



This TREATISE proves,

- I. **T**HAT there is such a thing as SELF-DECEIT.
- II. *Wherein it consisteth, or what it is.*
- III. *'Tis the only thing that destroys men.*
- IV. *That all men are subject to it.*
- V. *Whence this inclination to it ariseth.*
- VI. *The ways men take to accomplish it.*

Which are,

1. *Inconsideration.*
 2. *Want of Self-Examination.*
 3. *Unreasonable Prejudices.*
 4. *Undue Comparisons.*
 5. *Judging ourselves by others opinion of us.*
 6. *Over-rating outward acts of Religion.*
 7. *Over-valuing conformity to human Laws.*
 8. *A misplaced or mistaken Zeal.*
 9. *Vain Confidence of long life.*
 10. *Vain Trust in God's mercy.*
 11. *A false Opinion that God's Laws are impracticable.*
 12. *Taking Prosperity for a sign of Grace.*
- VII. *The Unreasonableness of it.*
VIII. *How it may be discovered.*
IX. *The Signs of it.*

THE
SELF-DECEIVER

PLAINLY

Discover'd to HIMSELF:

OR, THE

Serious Christian

INSTRUCTED

In his DUTY to GOD, to HIMSELF,
and to his NEIGHBOUR.

In some PRIVATE CONFERENCES between a
MINISTER and his PARISHIONER.

By CLEMENT ELLIS, *M. A.*

*Late Rector of Kirkby in Nottinghamshire, Prebend of
Southwell, and Fellow of Queen's-College, Oxon.*

HOMO *se non fallat*, DEUS *non fallit*.
August. Homil. 40.

L O N D O N:

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T H E
P R E F A C E.



THE following Treatise is one of the most excellent productions of an Author, who is well known to the world for his practical tracts already published, and the soundness of his morals, and sanctity of his life; and it must be lamented, that the publick has been so long deprived, by uncommon accidents, of the use of it, the pious Author having finished it for publication some time before his death, which happened about thirty years ago.

The Subject is universally useful, no less than to prevent the deception of mankind in that most important point, the salvation of their souls. To be deceived in a trivial matter by others, is justly looked upon as a weakness in our selves, and an indignity from others; but to deceive ourselves in what ought to be our greatest concern not to be mistaken in, is both folly and madness: and yet this Author very truly shews how ready we are to do this, and applies proper remedies to prevent it.

His manner of treating this subject is by way of Dialogue, the most natural and easy method of instruction; and he observes very justly in his characters, the Probable and Decorum requisite to this kind of writing. The foundation of all his arguments is taken from Scripture, pertinently urged, properly applied, and justly explained. Whenever he has occasion to speak of the more knotty points of divinity, he speaks distinctly and
rationally,

rationally, as well as orthodoxly, of every point, and well adapted to the understanding of him he instructs; and the familiar plainness of its style will unquestionably more fully answer the end of the pious and laborious Author, as well as the capacities it was designed for, than if it had been set off with greater ornaments of language, which the Author, in all his practical pieces, studiously avoided, having principally in view that happy perspicuity and plainness for which he was greatly famous; though 'tis at the same time very discernable, even in the plainest and most intelligible of his composures, that he wanted not any of the good qualities of a Christian Writer and a Gentleman.

This we may venture to assert, upon the most serious perusal of this excellent piece, That if the world could be persuaded to lay aside its itch after controversial pieces, which are the bane of Christianity, and would be, as it ought,

delighted with such writings as would better the lives of men, rather than amuse and puzzle their understandings, a more useful book could not be recommended to the publick, it containing the whole practical duty of a devout Christian, in all its various branches; in which the exemplary Author has not scrupled to intimate occasionally, with a piety and decorum peculiar to himself, the duty of the Pastor as well as the Parishioner; and it were to be wished, for the honour of the sacred function, that he had more followers and imitators among those of his own order, which perhaps would contribute to lessen that reproach and contempt, which is poured out on Religion by the Deists, the Free-thinkers, and Atheists of this back-sliding and apostate generation.

The Reader will observe, that there is such a peculiar and admirable strain of piety and goodness runs through the works of this devout Author (as has been observed by the Editor of some
of

of his former pieces) *that they merit a most distinguishing recommendation. He plainly, as that Gentleman observes, lets us see not only his skill and judgment, but his thorow feeling and experience of those many excellent truths which he has handled; so that we may truly say of him, that he was blessed with this peculiar privilege, of letting his Reader into the secrets of his heart, as well as into the strength of his arguments.*

He endeavours all along, continues that Gentleman, who had a personal knowledge of his life and conversation, to set Religion in the clearest and best light, and makes the most agreeable and rational representations of it, frequently exposing those doctrines, which ascribe too much, or too little to human reason, such as either render Religion very harsh or less amiable to creatures endued with reason and free-will, or such as endeavour to suit and adapt it to the corrupt inclinations of men. But above all things,

things, the vindicating religion in general, and opposing the scepticism and infidelity of the present age, was that which he had more carefully in view, and which he hath done to very good purpose.

We shall not attempt to give many particulars of the life of our pious Author, which has been already done, and prefixed to his three discourses on the Parables, an excellent piece, at present out of print; but for the sake of such of our readers as may not have heard of him, he having been so many years ago gathered to his fellow-saints, and passed from this transitory life to glory, where he is in possession of those rewards which the merciful God bestows upon souls so devout and painful as his, we shall take notice, that he was many years Rector of Kirkby, in the County of Nottingham, where the memory of his good life and sound doctrines is still dear to many pious persons; and in the year 1693, made a Prebend of the
Church

Church of Southwell, by Dr. Sharp, Lord Archbishop of York, altho' with some reluctance on his own part, because his infirmities (as he modestly judged) would not permit him to attend the service and business of the said Church; which was an excuse the good Archbishop would not allow of.

The great success of his pious labours in his own Parish is so well set forth in the following paragraph, that we shall borrow it from the above Editor, and the rather, because it will shew the Reader how excellently he was qualified, both by his example and his doctrine, to instruct mankind in the true way to salvation.

When he was first presented by the Duke of Newcastle, whose Domestick Chaplain he then was, to the Rectory of Kirkby, which was not long after the Restoration, He found that Parish in miserable disorder, and the sad effects of the Civil War were too notoriously
seen

seen in it, as he had been often heard to complain. Several, that had been soldiers and officers in the Parliament-army, then lived in the said town, leavened with *Antinomian* principles, and had corrupted others, and who shewed the greatest distaste to the settlement of the *Monarchy* and *Church* again upon their ancient foundations, which gave no small disturbance to this good man. And yet, by a prudent management of affairs, seasonable applications, and a mild and gentle behaviour towards them, he wrought a very great reformation among them in a very few years ; and many of those that had professed the greatest aversion to the establishment of the Church, became hearty friends to it, and were thorowly reconciled to the Constitutions and Orders of it ; insomuch, that in the last thirty years of his life at *Kirkby* (a pretty large Country Parish) he did not believe that he had three *Dissenters* in it.

No wonder, that a man so qualified by gentleness of temper and true piety, should prevail on the minds of men; and as his life was of a piece with his writings, no wonder that his preaching and teaching were attended with such efficacious effects: From such a heavenly temper as this, and that universal benevolence inseparable from it, the Reader will be able to account for that marvellous strain of piety and devotion, which displays itself throughout the following piece, and indeed in all his other works; and he will be taught from thence to expect in the following Treatise, and in all his writings, that extensive charity, and those earnest endeavours and forcible arguments, which he every where expresses and uses for the good of the souls of men.

I shall only farther take notice, that among several excellent sermons, and other pieces, which he had intended for the Press, some of which, 'tis feared,
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can never be recovered, there are two tracts happily preserved, that perhaps are not to be surpassed in the whole system of divinity, the Sacred Writings excepted, for the soundness of their doctrines, and the perspicuity and clearness and noble simplicity, for which the Author, (as has been observed) was so eminent: The one he has intitled, The Great Work of a Christian; or, The Necessity and Method of working out his Salvation; to which he intended to add, as the crown of this great work of a Christian, a most excellent discourse which he had prepared, of Communicating often in the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

*The other piece is a large and full Explication of the Church Catechism, which he finished in the last year of his life, and left it to the consideration of some of his brethren of the Clergy whether it should be made publick, who were pleased highly to approve of it, and recommended it to the Press with
great*

great earnestness, which his death (which happened soon after) is supposed to have prevented. How excellently well qualified he was to write such an *Explication*, the Reader will observe in many instances, but particularly in Sect. XVI. and XVII. of the ensuing piece, where, in the articles relating to deceiving our selves with regard to our *Faith* and *Hope*, he has gone thro', in a clear and edifying manner, every article of the *Apostles Creed*, and the *Lord's Prayer*, almost in a catechetical, tho a concise manner, suitable to the *Dialogue-way*, and which, 'tis very probable, gave him the first hints of the necessity and usefulness of going through the whole *Catechism* in the method which he has so excellently pursued.

These works may, in a proper time, be presented to the publick. Mean time we have to pray, that God will give a blessing to the following work, suitable to the pious intentions of the Author, and then the Reader will have

no

no cause to repine for any thing but its having been so long detained from the publick; though 'tis certain, it could never come out in an age that more wanted the good admonitions and instructions contained in it, than the present, and which more required so strenuous a vindication of the honour of God and Religion, and the laying open the different ways of Self-Deceit, by which inconsiderate and rash men endanger their eternal salvation.




THE



THE
SELF-DECEIVER
DISCOVERED TO
H I M S E L F.

S E C T. I.
The Nature of SELF-DECEIT.

Minister and Parishioner.

Par.  O D save you, *Sir*. I make bold this afternoon to come to see how you do. Methinks you look a little strangely upon me, as if you did not well know me.

Min. My dear neighbour ! Is it *you* indeed that I see ? Is it possible, that you have found the way to my house ? Pardon me, I pray, if I look'd upon you as a stranger ; and blame your own un-
B kindness

2 *The* SELF-DECEIVER

kindness for it; for truly 'tis so long a time since you were pleased to favour me with a visit, that I was a little surprized at your coming in, and could hardly believe it was *you* that I saw.

Par. Sir, though you see me but seldom at your own house, because I know you are a studious man, and I am loth to be too troublesome to you; yet I cannot well be called a stranger to you, seeing you see me so often at the Church.

Min. How often I see you at the Church, I shall more seasonably tell you hereafter, if you please to give me the opportunity of discoursing oftner with you. Now I tell you, that you are very welcome, and I beseech you, think your self so. Come, sit down by me, and let us talk a while of something that may do us good.

Par. For that end indeed am I now come; and seeing it is a piece of an *Holiday* with me, I was desirous to spend that *idle* time that I have now to spare from my daily labours, in your company; especially because you have often and earnestly in your Preaching, invited us to come sometimes, and have a little private conference with you. If therefore you be at leisure, I am very willing to spend an hour or two in some good discourse.

Min. I have indeed often invited you to confer with me in private, and I do assure you I was always in very good earnest; knowing it to be a thing exceeding needful for you: though I find it very hard to persuade you to it. I find (to my great grief) that my publick preaching to you in the Church (though with all the plainness and freedom which I can possibly use) hath not yet, after many years spent therein amongst you, had that good effect upon your souls, which it should have had. The fault must be either in *you* or in *me*, or (which I much fear) in us *both*. It concerneth me greatly to find it out, if it be possible,

ble, that, so far as is in my power, it may be amended : and this I cannot easily discover, without a more familiar acquaintance with you, whereby I may the better understand your various capacities, and your several needs, and how to suit my discourses unto them, and to help you to apply what you hear more particularly to your selves, that you may thereby grow more in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, as you are exhorted 2 Pet. iii. 18. that you may know your own selves better, whether you be in the faith, or no, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. and feel more matter of comfort and rejoicing in your selves, Gal. vi. 4.

Par. You say well, Sir ; and I hope I do feel in my self the comforts of a good conscience. I have (I thank God) profited much by your preaching, whatever you may think of me ; I am none of your *idle hearers*, but desire to be a good *Christian* ; and am so, I hope : And having (as I told you) this spare time, I took this opportunity to have a little talk with you about some things which you have lately told us in the *Pulpit*, that you may see I do not forget all that I hear from you.

Min. My dear neighbour, you have much cause to rejoyce, if you be indeed so good a *Christian*, as you take your self to be ; and to know this, will be matter of very great rejoicing to me, your very unworthy *Pastor*. What a comfort will it be to me, and how great cause shall I have to return all hearty thanks unto God for his blessing, if I may know, that I have not laboured in vain amongst you ? But by the way, give me leave to tell you, that some words you have now uttered, favour not of very much religion. You say, that this is a piece of a *Holyday* with you, and affords you some *idle* time from your ordinary labours, and this you are willing to spend with me.

4 *The* SELF-DECEIVER

Par. I said so indeed; neither do I see any thing therein, that you can find fault with.

Min. Yes, you are much to blame, that you have yet learn'd no better to esteem of an *Holy-day*. You seem to look upon an *holyday* as an *idle day*, and therefore to account it an *idle day*, because it calls you off from the common labours of your worldly calling. I pray, good neighbour, consider it seriously; Have we not *souls* to labour for, as well as bodies? Have we not a *God* to serve, as well as our selves? Have we not an eternal life in heaven to provide for, as well as a short life on earth? If you be truly sensible of this, and know what it is to *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12. you will think you have work enough to do on these days; and, you will be glad when they come, that, laying aside your worldly business, you may give yourselves wholly to those spiritual employments and exercises, whereby your souls may thrive, and be preserved in health. And though, if you be a hard labourer, some part of these days may well be spent by you in some honest and civil recreation for the refreshment of your body, and fitting it thereby for future labour; yet the principal end of such days is, to call us off from the business of this world, whereon our minds are too eagerly bent, to take more care of our immortal souls, of which we are apt to be too forgetful; and to praise *God* for those means of grace, and hopes of glory, which of his wonderful goodness he hath so plentifully vouchsafed to give us in *Jesus Christ*. So that this spare time (as you call it) from your ordinary labours, ought to be very precious to you, and should not be sported, or gamed, or drunk away idly and sinfully, but religiously improved to *God's* honour, and your own eternal welfare. He that rightly considers this, shall never find cause to quarrel

quarrel with an *holyday*, nor think fit to spend it as an *idle day*. Having told you this by the way only, I shall insist no longer upon it now, but desire you to tell me freely what those things are, about which you have now a mind to talk with me.

Par. I thank you, *Sir*, for this seasonable admonition; for I must needs confess you found cause enough for it in my words: yet, though the common custom hath taught me thus to speak, I hope my practice on these days is such, as you cannot justly blame. That you will not find fault with it, I dare not say; for I find that it is very hard for any man to live so, as to please you: If it be as hard to please *God*, as it is to please you, then are we all in a sad condition. You have lately told us publickly, that you are afraid that many of us are no good *Christians*, and that we do but deceive our selves, if we think we are. What have we done, or what have we said against you, that should provoke you to talk us at this rate? Pardon me, *Sir*, if hearing my self, with others, thus severely censured by you, I could give my self no rest, till I found this opportunity of letting you know that we take it very ill at your hands.

Min. Thus far you have done well, and I thank you for it, that you come to tell me plainly and freely of that which offends you; and I wish, that all others, who are in like manner offended at my words, would (instead of talking of me in the *Ale-house*, and in such other places, where I intend not to hear or answer them) either be so kind, as you now are, to tell me of it here at my own house, or (if that be too much trouble to them, or too great a condescension in them) to send for me, and I would very readily come to theirs, and endeavour to give them that due satisfaction, which I will now endeavour to give you. I have

said indeed the words you now charge me with, and I wish I might never have cause to say them any more. But now observe, I pray, neighbour; *First*, I did not say, that any amongst you would never be good *Christians*; that had indeed been rash and uncharitable judging. It is *God* alone that knows that, seeing it depends upon his own free grace, which I must not presume to limit, or foretel on whom he will or will not bestow it. Neither, *secondly*, did I say, that I know any amongst you not to be good *Christians*; and yet I might have said it; for it is a very sad truth, that too many do, by their open wickedness, demonstrate to all that see them, that they are no *Christians* yet, whatever they may be before they die. Nay, *thirdly*, I did not say so much, that I had this opinion of you, or did indeed think you no *Christians*, but only that I was afraid of it. Nor, *lastly*, did I say so much as this of you all, but of many of you. Hear what St. Paul saith of the *Galatians*, Gal. xiv. 11. *I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.* And also of the *Corinthians*, 2 Cor. xi. 2. *I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy.* What said I of you, in effect, more than this? It is not then any thing that you have done or spoken against me, that provokes me thus to talk to you, but it is your careless and irreligious behaviour towards *God*, that makes me afraid of many of you, lest you should come short of that happiness, which *God* hath provided for all his faithful servants. I judge as favourably of you all, as your behaviour will allow; and such is the love I bear you, that it is the exceeding great grief of my heart, that you will give me no cause to think better of you. If I had not a greater kindness for you, than you have for your selves, I would use you as ill as you use your selves. I would flatter you into a conceit that you are good *Christians*,

Christians, and let you run on without all check in the *broad way* to hell. This I know would oblige some of you to do me many a good turn which now I want; and hereby I should ease my self of a great deal of pains and trouble, which now, for your sakes, I thanklessly undergo. I would not make you my enemies by telling you the truth; I would not lay my self open to your displeasure and derision too, by reproving you for your faults; nor take a course whereby I can hope for no kind of temporal advantage to my self, but am sure to lead a more uneasy life amongst you, till it shall please *God* to work that happy change in you, which I earnestly long and pray for, but do not yet see.

Par. Your words, *Sir*, have almost persuaded me to think better of *you* than I did when I came in; but they cannot make me think any worse of *my self* for all that. I grow inclin'd to believe that you have some kind of love for us, and that your love makes you but too jealous over us, and to fear where you have no cause to fear; for I am very confident that I am a good *Christian*, and that I give you no cause to be afraid lest I should not prove so indeed in the end.

Min. My dear neighbour, the worst I wish you is, that you may never want sufficient cause to be confident of your good condition. And I earnestly beg of you to believe, that I shall always be so far from attempting to abate and lessen a well-grounded confidence in any of you, that I shall do my utmost endeavour to encourage you in it, and persuade you to hold it fast unto the end; that you may hold on chearfully in a *Christian* course of life, trusting firmly to the sure promises of *God* made unto all sincere *Christians* in the *Gospel* of *Jesus Christ*. That which I would persuade you to, is, to inquire impartially into the grounds

of your confidence, because (as you can easily understand without my teaching you) there is nothing more dangerous than to be confident in a wrong way, or where there is no reason for it.

Par. I readily grant you that. But why should you fear that I have not sufficient cause to be confident of the truth of my *Christianity*?

Min. Whether I thus fear concerning *you* or no, I have not yet told you: I have only said, that it is dangerous to be confident where there is no reason for it. And whatever my fears or thoughts of you may be, it is very needful for you to examine well the grounds of your confidence. For if they be good, then the more you have examin'd them, the better you understand them, and this addeth mightily to your confidence, and therein to your comfort; and if they be not good, you will thereby find out wherein you have been deceived, and will learn what you have yet to do to *make your calling and election sure*, 2 Pet. i. 10. which is a work so needful, that if you understand your self, you cannot chuse but grant, that it should be the great business of your life. And indeed the little care that you and others seem to take of this, is the reason why I am so jealous of you, and afraid that you do but *deceive your selves*, in thinking you are *Christians*.

Par. Wherein do we seem to you so careless? Or, what more care of our salvation would you have us take, than we do already? Surely, you take us to be very strange people, that you should think we care not whether we be saved or damned. Certainly, how simple soever you take us to be, you cannot think that we are so sottish, as to be willing to perish everlastingly. I would have you think, *Sir*, that you have men, and not brute beasts, to deal with.

Min.

Min. I shall, if you will have patience to hear me, shew you very plainly anon, wherein I think you too careless of yourselves. I do not think that any of you are willing to perish, but I fear very many of you do not enough consider how you may prevent your perishing, but are too apt to persuade yourselves you are safe, even when you are in greatest danger of perishing. And here, I cannot but exceedingly pity you, and grieve for your blindness: yea, my heart continually akes for you, when I see you live in so great confidence of eternal *happiness*, and yet shew forth so very little of the fruits of *holiness*, *without which*, you know that, *no man shall see God*, Heb. xii. 14. I take you not to be beasts, but men; and would fain see you live like men, which have reason, and understanding, and are able to consider the end of their doings. All that I would desire of you is, but to act considerately in all your actions as men should do; and that you would not rush forward unadvisedly upon dangers like the horse and mule, which have no understanding. In a word, that you would not, by an unreasonable *opinion* of your own *wisdom*, *goodness* or *safety*, *deceive yourselves* to your own utter undoing.

Par. I cannot but marvel at you, when you talk so much of our *deceiving ourselves*. A man may be deceived, there is no question of it; but that any man should *deceive himself*, you must pardon me if I say I think it impossible, and that in this you talk like a man that hath a mind to be accounted wiser than all mankind, and to understand mysteries which no man could ever see into but yourself: or that you would affright us out of our wits with a scare-crow of your own devising.

Min. God grant, that both you and I may become wise unto salvation! Which we shall never
be,

be, if we know not the *deceitfulness* of our own hearts, and how apt we are to *deceive ourselves*. *Self-deceit* is a disease so very common, that all men can easily see it, but they only that are most troubled with it. Neither seemeth it to me any wonder at all, when I meet with such as you, to hear you so pertly deny that there can be any such thing, and so scornfully deride all those that tell you of it. Nay, when I seriously consider, how very unreasonable and absurd a thing it is, for a man, endued with reason, wittingly and willingly to *deceive himself*, I cannot wonder that it should seem strange, yea indeed very strange, (especially to him who hath not been taught how much below himself man is fallen by sin) that a rational creature, such as man is, should possibly become guilty of so unreasonable a thing. And yet it would seem stranger to me, if men pretending to reason (as I see you do) should willingly confess themselves to be most unreasonable in the whole course of their lives. If it were true, that there could be no such thing, then I must confess I should talk very idly, when I tell you of it; and you had reason enough to be angry with me for troubling you about nothing. I should very much abuse my time and pains, in persuading men to take heed of that which cannot be, and to arm themselves against a shadow of a phant'sy. But that there is such a thing indeed very visible amongst us, and that it is no harmless thing, or slightly to be regarded by us, if we will have any care of our own welfare, I will be ready to shew you very clearly, whenever you will have the patience to hear me upon this subject.

Par. *Self-deceit* is a word that sounds so strangely in my ears, that I confess I wonder what you can make of it. And I perceive that you therefore reckon me in the number of your *Self-deceivers*,
because

because I cannot yet believe, that there can be any such men in the world. But it may be worth my while however, to hear what you have to say of it, if it be but to satisfy my curiosity. I shall not therefore grudge you the hearing whilst you discourse about it.

Min. I shall never go about to satisfy any man's curiosity, by discoursing of impertinent and unprofitable matters. If you have an itching ear, reserve it for some other, who hath no better work to do than to claw it for you. But if you can have the patience, to hear plain and necessary truths, such as may teach you to lead a *Godly* life, and walk in the right way to eternal happiness, I doubt not, but to make you clearly understand the thing that now you think so hard to be understood. Concerning *Self-deceit* I shall shew you these Eight things following.

- I. *What it is that I call by that name.*
- II. *That there is indeed such a thing to be found in men.*
- III. *That we are all naturally very subject to it.*
- IV. *Whence this evil inclination in us proceedeth.*
- V. *What methods men commonly use to deceive themselves.*
- VI. *How it doth ordinarily discover itself.*
- VII. *How unreasonable and absurd a thing it is.*
- VIII. *How a man may try himself whether he be a Self-deceiver, or no.*

Par. Whatever I think of *Self-deceit*, I see you are resolved to make something of it, before you have done. And truly by this great readiness of yours to be at so much pains for my sake, you have given me abundant cause to think very well of you, and that your great design and endeavour is to do us all the good you can. I cannot see what in the world should move you so willingly to
take

take upon you so great a trouble, but only the sense you have of your duty to *God*, and the care you have of our *Souls*. And seeing you are so earnest with us to take heed lest we *deceive ourselves*, I grow a little fearful that you really see some cause for it, and that we are not so good *Christians*, as we ought to be. Go on therefore, I beseech you, in your discourse, I promise that I will be very attentive to what you shall say. One thing let me beg of you, that you will consider with whom you have to do, and use such plainness of expression, that I may be able to understand you. For I have heard many *sermons*, and read diverse *books*, which I have heard many learned and good men highly commend, and yet I could get very little good, if any at all, by hearing or reading them; because they were so full of hard words and phrases, such as we country people are not acquainted with. And this, amongst other things, hath made me have a worse opinion of you *Ministers*; you seem most of you, in all your *sermons* and *writings*, little to regard our *benefit*, so you may shew your own *learning* and *eloquence*.

Min. You do very well, to mind me of this; tho' you cannot but know, that I always labour to express myself, to such as you, in so plain and familiar a way, that some of you have been apt to say that I tell you nothing but what you know already; and that I labour so much to make you understand me, as if I took you to be children; and my too much plainness is loathsome to you, and pretended to be a reason why you come so seldom to *Church*. So hard a matter is it to please you all. But I very willingly comply with your desire, and intreat you withal, that if any thing slip from me, which you do not well understand, you will not let it pass, but bid me explain it to you.

Par.

Par. I thank you, Sir, for that liberty, and I am resolv'd to make use of it ; begin therefore, I pray', and tell me, What it is, that you mean by *Self-deceit*.

Min. I shall, as plainly as I can. But let me first ask you, if you know what it is to be deceived?

Par. I cannot be ignorant of that at this age : I could not live so many years, and in such a world as this, without learning that by woful experience. I have met with too many *deceivers* of all sorts. False servants have deceived me by idleness, lying and theft. False friends have deceived me by fair promises and good words, failing me notwithstanding in my greatest need. False tradesmen and bargainers have deceived me, by concealing the faults of things sold me. False borrowers have deceived me, in never paying again what they borrow'd of me. It would be an endless thing, to tell you, how many ways, and by how many people I have been deceived ; as indeed most honest and well meaning men have (I fear) felt to their sorrow what *deceit* is. But I do not remember that I ever *deceived myself*.

Min. You do not remember it, because you were never willing to take notice of it : but I fear it will be a very easy matter to shew you, that you have *deceived yourself* more than any of these have deceived you ; and to your far greater hurt too, though you are yet so insensible of it. You have, by *idleness* and *lying*, and *theft* too, done yourself more hurt, than any the worst *servant*, that ever you kept, hath done you. You have been a falser *friend* to yourself, than he that hath most failed you in your need. You have done more wrong to yourself, by false-covenanting, and covenant-breaking, and by defrauding yourself of your due, than any *tradesman*, *bargainer* or *borrower* that you ever dealt with, as I shall (I hope) by

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God's help, convince you anon. In the mean time, let me ask you what you mean, when you say, that these persons *deceived* you?

Par. It is easy enough to tell you what I mean. They made me *believe* a lye, they made me *trust* and *rely* on that which failed me, they made me *hope* for that, which would never be; they made me *mistake* one thing for another, and *think* of things otherwise, than in truth they were; and all this to my great loss.

Min. This indeed it is to be *deceived*, When a man is brought to think that to be true, which is false; or that to be false, which is true: to judge a thing to be good and profitable to him, which is indeed evil and hurtful; or that to be evil and hurtful which is good and profitable. When he is persuaded by false appearances of reason (as it is in the *Prophet Isai. v. 20.*) to call evil good, and good evil; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness: bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. And when a man, upon such false conceits, is persuaded to love, and desire, and hope for, and seek after that, which he shall never find or enjoy; and to prize and set his heart upon any thing, wherein there proves to be nothing of that, which he would have had, or expected to find in it; then is he deceived.

Par. All this I readily grant.

Min. And by this, you may easily perceive what it is for a man to *deceive himself*. For, when he himself is the cause of his own *being deceived*, then is he his own *deceiver*. When a man's love and inclination to any evil is so strong in him, that it perverts his judgment, and persuades him to esteem it no evil, or a less evil than it is: and when by his own corrupt reasonings, or by his giving too easy and credulous an ear to the deceitful reasonings of other men (whilst he might have done otherwise

otherwise if he would) he suffers himself to be tamely led into error by them, is it not plain that such an one is the cause of his own being deceived?

Par. He is so, no man can deny it. But will any man be so mad as to do thus as you say?

Min. I will answer that more fully anon. I am not yet proving, that men do *deceive themselves*, but only endeavouring to make you understand what is meant by *Self-deceit*. And to this end I will use the *Prophet's* words again (*Isai. xxix. 7, 8.*) *As in a dream of a night vision, a hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh, and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite:* Thus, God knows, it is with too many of us. We are all our life long, as it were, in a pleasant but deceitful *dream*. We vainly *dream*, and are as confident of it, as many men are in their sleep of the truth of what they only *dream*, that we are good *Christians*, whilst we have nothing of the true goodness of *Christianity* in us. We *dream* very sweetly, that we have indeed that which we have not; we think we have *grace* and *virtue*, yea, and the *pardon* of all our sins, and we have them not. We *dream* again, that we are very busy in doing that, which we never in earnest attempted to do; we think that we are walking in those *ways of pleasantness and paths of peace*, *Prov. iii. 17.* in that *narrow way* which will bring us home in good time to *God* and *Heaven*, but we are *deceived*, and are walking on as fast as we can in the *broad way* to destruction all this while. We *dream*, that we are truly religious, and that we make a conscience of our ways; and yet this is no more than a *seeming religious*, as *St. James* calleth it, *Jam. i. 26.* and a *vain religion*, such as bringeth not forth fruits

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unto

unto holiness, and therefore can never bring us to our desired end, which is eternal life. As the wise man tells us, *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*, Prov. xiv. 12. And there be those, who having forsaken God the fountain of living waters, are always hewing for themselves cisterns, even broken cisterns, that can hold no water, Jer. ii. 13. Who foolishly spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not, Isai. lv. 2. Who unprofitably labour for the wind, Eccl. v. 16. Of whom we may say, in the Psalmist's words (Psalm. ii. 1.) they are always imagining some vain thing: or in those (Psalm. xxxix. 6.) *They walk in a vain shew, they disquiet themselves in vain. Suffering vain thoughts to lodge within them*, Jer. iv. 14. And leading a vain life or conversation, as it is called, 1 Pet. i. 18. All that such persons now please themselves with, is at present *Vanity*, and in the end will prove *vexation of spirit*, when they shall be made sadly sensible, what *fools* they have made themselves, by *dreaming* that they were *wise*, and what destruction they have brought upon themselves, by crying to themselves *peace, peace, when there is no peace*: as it is said of some, 1 Thes. v. 3.

Par. I now plainly see, that by *Self-deceivers*, you mean all those that consider not how they live, or what will become of them in the end; but going on securely in their own ways, doubt not but all will be well enough with them at last. Surely, there cannot be many such amongst us.

Min. I wish it may prove as you say; but we shall see that better anon. Now, that you may yet more fully understand me, I shall say something more distinctly of this *Self-deceit*. *First*, in relation to that *End* which we aim at in all our desires, hopes and endeavours. *Secondly*, in respect of the *Means* which we choose for our attaining to
that

that end. And *Thirdly*, as it regards our present spiritual *state* and condition in this world.

Par. I shall willingly hear you, say what more you please. But tell me first, I pray, what you mean by the *End*, which men aim at in all things. I suppose that several men have several *ends*, and that they do not all of them aim at one and the same thing: neither doth the same man propound to himself the same *end* in all that he doth; but he hath a several *end* to himself in almost every thing that he goeth about.

Min. I shall easily grant you, that several men have several *ends*, which they aim at in most of their actions. One aims at riches, another at pleasures, a third at honours, and so all men as their inclination leads them. So, 'tis very true, that in several sorts of actions the same man hath several more immediate *ends*. I do not *write* for the same *end* that I *eat* for; nor do you *plow* for the same *end* that you *play* for. But besides these, there is certainly one *ultimate* or *main end*, which all men desire; and this is it which they call by the name of *Happiness*. All men have a desire to be happy, though most of them miserably *deceive themselves* in their thoughts of it, and endeavours to compass it.

Par. Now I understand you, That whatever other *particular ends* men may have in what they do, yet do they all generally aim at being *happy*. And truly I am thus far of your mind: Go on therefore, I beseech you, in your own method; and tell me *first*, what you mean by mens *deceiving themselves* about this *end*.

Min. I mean this, That men are very apt to frame unto themselves a false *notion* or *conceit* of *happiness*, and to persuade themselves that it is just such a thing as they would have it, when really it is quite another kind of thing than they take it to be.

Par. Say you so? Truly I had thought that all men had been always agreed in the same common notion of *Happiness*, and that no difference could possibly arise in mens minds about it. I will be so free with you as to tell you what I think of it, and then tell you me if you do not think all men are of the same mind.

Min. I am beholden to you for that; let me hear, I pray, what is your opinion of it?

Par. 'Tis plainly this, I think, he is a *happy* man that is free from all *evil*, and enjoyeth all *good*; I mean, all that his nature is *capable* of. So that *Happiness* is no less thing, than the complete *satisfaction* of all a man's desires, whether to be safe from *evil*, or to enjoy *good*. And I cannot look upon him as a *happy* man, that is *unsatisfied*, or wants any thing that he hath a desire to have, or is not altogether in such a condition as he would be in.

Min. You say very well, if you do but well understand what you say. This is indeed the right general notion of complete *happiness*. And herein I think men are generally agreed. But what are they the better, so long as they understand not either, *first*, What that thing is, which, being attained to, will give them this full *satisfaction*; or, *secondly*, What kind of desires those are, in the satisfaction whereof consists their *happiness*. The ignorance of these two things hath caused a great variety of opinions about *happiness*, which I will not trouble you with.

Par. I desire not that you should; it is enough, if I can attain to the knowledge of the truth. And because I would not be *deceived* in a matter of so near concernment as is my *happiness*, I desire you, for my surer learning, to explain your meaning, by as easy terms as you can, in this point.

Min.

Min. It was my intention to do so; for I desire not to shew you, how well I can speak; but to make you understand the things whereof you cannot be safely ignorant. And *first*, you must know, that it is not every *desire*, which a sinful man hath, that must be *satisfied*, to make him *happy*.

Par. Can a man be *happy*, without having his *desire*, or whilst he wants what he longeth for?

Min. A man cannot be *happy*, so long as he wants what he *desires*, and continueth to *desire* it. Some *desires* there are, which are not to be *satisfied*, but to be wholly *laid aside*, to make a man *happy*. Men do not rightly consider the corruption of our nature by sin; and so are not able to distinguish between the *desires* of *nature*, and the *desires* of *sin*; but take the present *cravings* of *corruption*, whatsoever they are, to be the *natural desires* of the *soul*. And hereupon they are apt to judge of *happiness* by their present corrupt inclinations, and to fancy it must needs be something, that must satisfy their present longings, or satiate their lusts. You have, I suppose, seen a man in a high fever greatly thirsting after drink, and calling still for more, and denying that any thing will do him good, but to drink as much as he desireth: such a man's thirst proceeded from his disease; and the way to make him well, is not to give him drink as long as he thirsteth for it, which might, it may be, sooner kill him, than satisfy his desire; but by proper remedies to abate the fever, and then the thirst would cease. So is the case with us; we have sick souls, and many of our present *desires* spring only from our disease, which is sin: Such *desires* therefore are not to be *satisfied*; but our souls are to be cured, or reduced to some good degree of health, and then these *desires* will *cease*, and others come in their room. It is very true therefore, that *Happiness* shall be the *satisfaction*

satisfaction of the *desires* of the soul; yet not of such *desires*, as in this state of corruption we feel most restlessly craving in us; but of such *desires*, as would be natural to the soul, were it in a state of health. And, because there can be nothing in *heaven* suitable to the *desires* of a *carnal* heart, therefore is there no possibility of finding *happiness* there, so long as such *desires* continue; and it is therefore the work of *grace*, to cure the soul of its *disease*, that the *desires* thereof may be *corrected* and *altered*, and all the corrupt *affections* and *lusts* of the *flesh* mortified; that all the longings of our hearts may be after the *perfection* of our nature, that so we may become capable of that *satisfaction* which *heaven* affordeth; of which I may have a fitter occasion to tell you more hereafter.

Par. I thank you heartily for what you have told me now, and I do confess 'tis more than I ever well understood before. I now see, that the first mistake which we are prone to fall into, whilst we think of *happiness*, as of the *satisfaction* of our *desires*, is this, That we think of the *desires* of *corrupt* nature, instead of those which are proper to *renewed* and *sanctified* nature. And we fancy we cannot be *happy*, but by having those *desires* fulfilled; when indeed we cannot be *happy*, so long as we have any such *desires*. Be pleased now to proceed to the next thing.

Min. I shall need to say but little of that now, because it will come in our way more seasonably afterwards. But if you please, you can easily gather thus much your self from what I have told you: That men having first *deceived themselves* into a false *notion* of *happiness*, by imagining, that it must be the *satisfaction* of such *desires*, as now they find in themselves, must needs, in the next place, either think, that there is nothing which can *satisfy* their *desires*, and so that there can be no such thing

thing as *happiness*; or, that the thing, whatever it is, the enjoyment whereof must make them *happy*, must needs be suitable to those *desires*; that is, something like the things which they can now love and delight in. Now, though men can hardly be so absurd, as to hope they shall find the same things in *heaven*, which they love so dearly on earth, such as *gold* and *silver*, variety of curious *meats* and *drinks*, fine *houses*, *gay cloaths*, and the like; yet when they read the *Scripture* describing unto us the *joys* and *blessedness* of eternity, *figuratively*, in *metaphors* and *similitudes*, borrowed from such things as these; as for example, when they find such things mentioned as a *kingdom*, and a *crown* of glory, an *inheritance* incorruptible, a *tree* of life, *treasures* in heaven, true *riches*, *pleasures* at God's right hand for evermore, and such like; their thoughts are apt to be too gross and earthy, and to feed themselves too much upon the *letter*. I wish that you could shew me many amongst you, that are able to go any farther in their thoughts of *happiness*, than to think, that in *heaven* they shall be freed from all those things, which they *here* account *evil*; and that they shall have all the *pleasures* and good things, which they can *now* desire or wish for, without so much as once considering, that the great and mother *evil* of all is *sin*, wherewith their natures are so corrupted, that they are not capable of *happiness* whilst it continues in them; but that they must be freed from it before they can be *happy*. As little do they consider what kind of good thing and pleasure it is, which they are to seek for; that *seeing* of God, and perfect *delight* in the enjoyment of him, who is the true fountain of life and *happiness*. Thus many say, *Who will shew us any good?* Psal. iv. 6. Something good and lovely they expect, but little know they what that *good* is, or in what to seek it. Little

do they look upon that right good indeed, which the *Psalmist* there, in his own devout wish, pointeth out unto us, when he prayeth thus, *Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us.* In God alone is all true happiness: and it is the *light of his countenance* only, that can put perfect gladness into the heart of man; and whoso dreameth, that any thing but this can make him *happy*, doth but *deceive himself*.

Par. You have made me now understand what you mean by *Self-deceit*, as it respects the *end* of our actions. Will you now tell me as plainly, how you think we are apt to *deceive our selves* about the *means* conducing to that end? And here *first*, What do you mean by the *Means of Happiness*?

Min. By the *Means of Happiness*, I understand all those things which God hath ordained, and appointed us to observe and do, by the right use whereof he will bring us to that blessed state and condition. That such things there are, I hope you cannot deny, else I would prove it to you.

Par. I cannot deny that there are certain helps, which God, of his great goodness, affordeth us, to bring us to *heaven*; and that, without making good use of them, we can never come there. But how do you think that we *deceive our selves* in these things?

Min. That I will shew you very briefly. Two ways men are apt to *deceive themselves* in the *means* of their happiness. *First*, by choosing wrong means; and *secondly*, by abusing the right means.

Par. How *first* by choosing wrong means?

Min. When men choose, and make use of such things, as *means* of attaining to *happiness*, which neither of their own nature, nor by the special institution or appointment of God, can have any tendency thereunto; but will indeed bring them to misery in the end. And thus it is, when men
exercise

exercise themselves in such things as either are forbidden by *God*, or have no real goodness in them, or help not to make men good, and to correct the viciousness of their nature: or, when men invent to themselves ways of worshipping, honouring and pleasing *God*, and labour to pacify his wrath, and obtain his favour, by things wherein he hath no delight, not ever required at their hands. All this is labour to no purpose; men may thus please themselves; but if they think hereby to please *God*, or to attain to true *happiness*, they *deceive themselves*.

Par. Thus, you say, we may *deceive our selves*, in our choice of wrong means; but how do you conceive we do so too in abusing of the right means?

Min. Men may *deceive themselves*, by not using aright the proper means of happiness, and so fall short of that which they hope for, and which, by the right use of those means, they might have come to. For, as a man that sits close by a great fire to cool himself, loseth his end, by choosing wrong means; so he that having a purpose to warm himself by the fire, shall thrust his hand or foot into it, will feel that he hath, to his sorrow, abused the means of warmth. He that hath appointed the means, hath ordered also the right use of them, and given us directions, which if we do not follow, we abuse them, and lose the benefit of them. The instrument in the hand of the workman will not do the work it was made for, being used any how. A plaister for the head or stomach will not cure those parts by being applied to the foot, much less, by being wrapped up in a box. What *God* hath appointed to be the *means* of man's *happiness*, as it must be used, or else it will not profit, so must it be used according to its nature, and in that manner which *God* hath

appointed, or he that useth it will find that he hath only abused both it and himself in the use of it.

Par. Thus far, I hope, I understand you. That which remains is, that you shew me now, in the *third* place, how you think we *deceive our selves* in relation to our present *state* and condition in this world.

Min. This *Self-deceit* lieth in our *judging* amiss of our selves, as to our spiritual state; as whether we be in a *state of sin*, or in a *state of grace*. And here it is too easy for a man to mistake the temper of his own heart and spirit, and the goodness or badness of his conversation and course of life. And thus there may be a twofold mistake, the one very pleasing, but very dangerous; the other indeed less dangerous, but very uncomfortable.

Par. Which is the former, that you think so dangerous?

Min. The former is this, When a man taketh himself to be in a state of *grace*, and a sincere *Christian* in heart and life too, but is not so indeed: This man I take to be in a most dangerous condition, though he comforteth himself mightily in it. Such a man very possibly may not be deceived in the right notion or nature of true happiness; neither yet in the choice of the proper means conducing thereunto; and, it may be, is not ignorant of the right use of those means: but he is an *hypocrite*, and walketh always in a disguise, and hath so long accustomed himself to a scenical religion, and to act the person of a religious man, that he taketh himself really to be what he would seem to be. He hath played the religious man's ape so long, that he hath forgotten what a brutish and ill-favoured creature he is. For want of a due inspection into himself, and a frequent and impartial examination of his own heart,

heart, he is altogether unknown to himself; and persuadeth himself, without all cause, to believe, that his heart is right with *God*, and that all his ways are pleasing to *God*: whilst, in truth, the case is far otherwise with him, and he is no better than a *self-deceiving hypocrite*. Such an one hath as strong a hope and confidence as any man can have; but, alas! *the hypocrite's hope shall perish*, Job viii. 13. *His hope shall be cut off, his trust shall be as a spider's web. He shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not indure*, ver. 14, 15.

Par. Well, Sir; but who are they that are mistaken of themselves, but with less danger?

Min. Many very good and pious *Christians*; who, through some distemper of body, or weakness of mind, are apt to be very troublesome to themselves, when they have, of most others, least cause for it. These use to look upon themselves on the wrong side only, and through an excess of humility, have the eyes of their souls so continually fixed upon their spots and imperfections, that they appear to themselves all monstrous, and they cannot take notice of the gracious work of *God's Spirit* wrought in them. Hence they judge themselves to be no true *believers*, no true *penitents*, no true *lovers* of *God*, and therefore no true *children* of *God*; but rather such as *God* hath for their sins quite cast off and *forsaken*. And thus, in a disconsolate posture of mind, they walk always dejectedly, bewailing their sad and desperate condition; though they have no other cause to think themselves thus unpardonably wicked, but only, that they are not perfectly holy: neither will they by any means be persuaded to think better of themselves, or admit of comfort, so long as they feel any remains of sinfulness in themselves, or are not altogether so good, as they should and would be.

Par.

Par. This is a sad condition indeed ; I pray *God* to defend all good *Christians* from it : I would not come into such a condition as this is, for all the world.

Min. I do not blame you for being unwilling to be in such a condition ; but let me warn you, my friend, to take heed that you be not in a worse.

Par. Can a man be in a worse condition, than to go mourning all his days, and despairing of ever being happy ?

Min. It is too plain indeed, that most men choose rather to go laughing to hell, than weeping to heaven ; and, contrary to *Solomon's* judgment, *Ecc. vii. 2.* think it better to go to the house of feasting, than to the house of mourning. But I would have you know, that the persons of whom I now speak, though they lie under a *Self-deceit*, which, because it is very uncomfortable and uneasy, is carefully to be shunned, are yet such, as have most high and honourable thoughts of *God*, and a deep sense both of his goodness, and their own obligations thereby to duty : their most earnest desire is to serve him better ; and their only trouble is, that they fear they serve him not as they ought : and though they fear to excess, yet are they far from despair. I must not now stay to shew you at large what the condition of such persons is : Only this I affirm, that as this kind of *Self-deceit* is much less common, so is it by far less dangerous than the former ; and you have much more cause to pray for your self and others, that *God* would defend you and them from *that* than from *this*. For as, according to the *Proverb* (*Prov. xxvi. 12.* *There is more hope of a fool, than of one that is wise in his own conceit :* so is there more hope, that these, who now thus mourn, shall be comforted ; than that they, who now laugh, shall not

not for ever weep and wail, and gnash their teeth in torment.

Par. I shall not desire you to discourse any longer of that now. I have reason to fear I have almost tired you by this time with this long trouble that I have now given you; though I perceive you are not easily tired, where you can hope by your pains to do us good. By what you have already said, you have made me understand what you mean by *Self-deceit*. And truly, methinks, I begin to doubt a little, that some such thing may be found among us; and that you have greater cause, than we are sensible of, to speak to us as you do. And I am so well pleased already, by this little experience of it, with this way of bestowing my spare time, that, if you please to give me leave, I am resolved to trouble you oftner.

Min. I suppose, what I have told you now, may be enough for one time to load your memory withal; and besides, 'tis probable you have other needful business to go about. I will not press you therefore to a longer stay; but telling you, that the oftner you come, the welcomer you shall be, I bid you farewell for this day.





S E C T. II.

*There is such a thing as SELF-DECEIT
among men.*

Min.



Elcome, good neighbour; I am glad to see you here again so soon. I hope our last discourse hath done neither of us any hurt. What think you yet of *Self-deceit*?

Par. To tell you truly, I know not well what to think of it; I have thought so much of it since I was last here, that I am ready to suspect there is such a thing among us. And yet I am loth to think any of us so foolish, as to *deceive our selves*, especially in matters of religion.

Min. I wish you were all as wise as some of you think your selves to be, and that I had none but wise men to deal with. But if you only suspect, and do not certainly believe, that there is such a thing as *Self-deceit*, you are yet too great a stranger to the fountain of true wisdom, the *Word of God*, and therefore too regardless of your own soul. You will not surely so much as pretend to be a *Christian*, if you do not frequently read the *Scriptures*; and you cannot have read the *Scriptures*, if you have not read of *Self-deceit*. And again, I must tell you, that if you have read of it there, and yet believe not that there is such a thing, you are no *Christian*. Have you not there
read

read of some that do *deceive themselves*? And are you not therein warned to take heed that you do not *deceive your self*?

Par. Now you mind me of it, I think indeed, I have read something to that purpose, but I cannot now remember where.

Min. I will therefore help you to call it to mind. Hath not St. *John* told us (*1 John* i. 8.) That if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us. Do you think that the *Apostle* had no occasion given him by some in his time to say these words? And what occasion, I pray, could he have to say thus, if there be no such thing among men as *Self-deceit*? You know there be some amongst us, that are bold enough to boast of perfection; for so do they whom you call *Quakers*. And I can tell you of some others, who, though they will confess themselves to be sinners, do yet in that sense, which seems to some the proper sense of St. *John's* words, say that they have no sin. For suppose the *Apostle's* meaning be this, That if any man imagine that he is not such a sinner, as stands in need of the satisfaction of *Christ's* death for the pardon of his sins, and needs not believe, that *Christ* offered himself up to God a propitiatory sacrifice (as St. *John* intimates, *cap.* ii. v. 2.) for our sins; or that his blood was the true price and ransom, whereby we are redeemed from the wrath to come, such an one deceiveth himself in so thinking: And then will it concern the *Socinians* to look to it, that they be not found *Self-deceivers*. And indeed, above all others that I know (except such as join with them in their most execrable blasphemies against the eternal Son of God) they have need to look to it, that they be not deceived: seeing they, against the clearest testimony of the *Holy-Ghost* in the Scripture (whom they use no better than they do God the Son) deny the
Godhead

Godhead of our holy JESUS, who is over all God blessed for ever. Amen, Rom. ix. 5.

Par. The *Quakers* I know to be a silly deluded sort of people, and regard not much what they say; and as for the *Socinians*, I know not what they are: But we, with whom you have to do, are *Christians*, and far from such abominable opinions as theirs.

Min. I am not sorry, that you know not the *Socinians*; but wish heartily, that you may never know them. But this I must tell you, they pretend as highly to be good *Christians*, as any of us can do; and if they may deceive themselves, notwithstanding such pretences, then 'tis possible that others, who pretend as much, may do so too. However, from St. *John's* words you may see that there is such a thing among men as *Self-deceit*.

Par. I grant it readily; and you need say no more to convince me of my ignorance. But still I hope there are few *Self-deceivers* among your *Parishioners*.

Min. It is well you so readily yield to the truth, when it is discovered to you. I might now spare my pains in quoting any more *Scriptures* to this purpose. So plain a truth needs no large proof. Yet, because by some other texts, wherein there is mention made of *Self-deceit*, you will not only be more abundantly convinced that there is such a thing, but also be prompted to the consideration of some things, wherein it is wont to shew it self, which otherwise, it may be, you would take little notice of; I think we may do well to consider some few of them.

Par. As you please, *Sir*, for that; I am ready to learn any thing of you, that you think fit for me to know.

Min. Next therefore, I desire you to observe two places, which lie close together in the *Epistle*
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of St. *James*, and point out unto us (as with the finger) two sorts of persons very subject to this evil; and these, I fear, we may very easily find amongst our selves in too great numbers. In the former of these two places, *viz. James i. 22.* we have this exhortation given, *Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* Where the word rendered *deceiving*, signifies a fallacious or captious way of arguing, or a crafty reasoning, such as wrangling *sophisters* were wont to glory in, and they who made it their business to *beguile men with enticing words*, as you read, *Col. ii. 4. that is,* An insinuating form of speech, wherein was a fair shew and resemblance of truth. As counterfeit gold, you know, may look in all respects so like true gold, that men are often deceived, and take it for that which is pure and good; and think themselves to be rich, when, alas! they have nothing but a little gilded brass or copper. Do you think that there are not many amongst us, that put such fallacies and deceitful tricks upon themselves? Who, by a secret kind of false reasoning within themselves, are at some pains to persuade themselves to believe a lye; and to think themselves very beautiful, even as fair and lovely in *God's* eyes, as they strive to seem in the eyes of men; and fancy that all their wrinkles are filled up, and their spots washed off, when they are but very slightly covered with a borrowed colour? The *Heathens* deceived themselves in thinking that they should be heard for their *much speaking* in prayer, *Matt. vi. 7.* And the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, who were but like painted sepulchres, beautiful without, and full of rottenness within, for a pretence or shew could make long prayers, *Matt. xxiii. 14.* And it is too well known, that too many professors of Christianity are as well versed in these deceitful arts, as any of them; and
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are willing not only to be accounted by others for their worldly advantage, but even to account themselves, for the stilling of their own consciences, very good *Christians* ; and for this only reason, that they are wont to talk much *of God*, and *to God* ; that they daily read some chapters in the Bible, and are very frequent hearers of the Word preached and expounded by others. It is great pity indeed, that any man or woman should bestow so much time and pains in so useful and necessary exercises, as these are, to so little, or so bad a purpose, as it is too certain that some do. For whilst such people are apt to persuade themselves, that so long as they hear or read the *Word of God* attentively, and do in some measure understand the sense of what they hear and read, and find that they believe it with an historical faith to be a real truth, they may content themselves with *this* only, they attain to no more than a little notional and speculative religion, which serves them only to fill their heads with vain conceits of their own great proficiency in divine knowledge, and their tongues with matter of discourse and proud boasting of their own piety : nothing of the true power and virtue of the Word, which they hear or read, descendeth into the heart, or changeth the affections from worldly and sensual, to heavenly and spiritual things ; or bendeth the will unto holiness, settling it in a firm and holding resolution to obey from the heart the *Gospel* of *Christ* in a heavenly conversation. Yet till this be done, so that a man makes it his business as much to do, as to hear, and heareth chiefly in order to doing, he doth but miserably cheat himself.

Par. That must needs be confessed ; we cannot any of us be so simple as to imagine, that all the holy precepts of the *Gospel* were given only to be

be read or heard, and not to be obeyed ; or that the promise of blessedness is made to them that hear *Christ's* laws, but obey them not. If any one can so think, there is no doubt of it but he *deceiveth himself*.

Min. And if they that hear, and do not obey, *deceive themselves* ; what think you of them that will needs be accounted *Christians*, and yet neither *hear* nor *do* : or at best very seldom either hear or read the word of God ; or hear and read it very carelessly, and as men not concerned, either to remember, or understand, or apply what they hear or read ; are not they deceived ?

Par. They must needs be so, and that by themselves.

Min. Now let us consider what the same *Apostle* saith, at the 26th verse. His words are these : *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. He that heareth, and doeth not, deceiveth himself.* Now a part of this *doing* of the word, which is the end of *bearing* it, consisteth in the action of the *Tongue*, and in the religious use of it ; which, if it be not well governed and ruled by the laws of God, is of all others the most unruly and mischievous member. And of all other *Christian* duties, this of governing the *tongue*, and restraining it from its extravagancies, (because there is some difficulty in it, and it calls for the greatest vigilance) is most generally neglected. Nay, it is a thing very observable, that even they, who study most how to seem religious, seem to have least regard to this great duty. The *zeal* of a great many is excessively *talkative* ; and, what is worse, the highest pretenders to this zeal, are ready to accuse themselves of too much coldness and indifferency, if this *talkative humour* run not over, upon all occasions, in most virulent and bitter reproaches,

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cenfures and reviling fpeeches. You fhall often fee them, that have fo much fenfe of religion, as to keep off their hands from other mens eftates and perfons, and to keep themfelves very punctual and fquare in all their tradings and ordinary dealings with their neighbours, and to preferve their bodies temperate and chafte, yea, and their tongues too from horrid oaths and blafphemies, and many other prophanenefles, wherewith the language of many in this age is thought to be graced and adorned, yet give themfelves an intolerable liberty, where *Chriftian* charity ought to reftrain them, in railing and backbiting, and at leaft bufily prating of other peoples perfons, behaviours, apparel, and every thing of their neighbour's, that is of leaft concernment to them to meddle with. Goffipping women have always been defervedly noted for this fault ; but I could wifh, that this vice might be wholly condemned to fo narrow a province, and reigned no where elfe, but at fuch female meetings. The modetty of the fex (if fuch a thing yet there be in thefe days of impudence) would certainly in a little time make them, who are ufually afhamed of no fin fo much as being out of the fafhion, afhamed to be out of fafhion here too, could they but once fee that this tatling humour were difcountenanced and out of ufe with thofe, of whom they fhould learn, if not more religion, yet at leaft better manners. But where fhall they now find examples of modetty among either fex to fhame them out of this foolifh and unmannerly cuftom ? Whatever the fins of the tongue are (and they are fo many, that even that active and overbushy member itfelf would be almoft tired fo much as to name them all) *He* or *She* that will be *religious* indeed, muft confcientioufly avoid them all ; and caft as it were a *bridle* upon the *tongue*, with as much care, as we are wont to do
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upon an unruly headstrong horse, that it may be by a religious care held in from those extravagancies into which it is by nature very forward to run. *St. James* hath told us, that 'tis possible we may have a *vain religion*, a religion that is good for nothing, that will stand us in no stead, but fail us at the last, when we think we are going to receive the reward of piety. A religion we may have in *shew* only, which may make a great flourish in the world, but yet is barren and bringeth not any good fruit to perfection. And with such a religion as this a man may please himself for a time, and *seem* to himself to be somebody, and grow mightily in love with himself, as with a very *Saint* indeed, a most *Godly* man, and one of the very few that have hit into the narrow way. And yet, if all this *Religion* and *Godliness* have so little power, that it is not able to hold in his unruly tongue within the compass of *piety*, *modesty* and *charity*, it will concern him to look out for some better kind of religiousness than he yet hath, even that which may be able to get the command of his tongue, else he will find to his sorrow that all his *seeming* to himself religious, was a mere *Self-deceit*.

Par. 'Tis well if we all prove not *Self-deceivers* in the end. If so much of religion lie in governing the tongue, into what part of the world must we go to seek it? For I am sure it is a very great stranger among us. I begin more and more to see what fools we are, that do not more carefully read the *Scriptures*, which would soon shew us what we are, and what we should be. If you have any more texts of Scripture to produce to this purpose, pray let me hear them?

Min. You have heard *St. John* and *St. James*; I will now tell you what *St. Paul* saith, *Gal. vi. 3.* *If any man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* You must know that

the *Apostle* is in this *chapter* exhorting those that are *Spiritual* (whether by those he mean the *Governors* of the *Church*, as is very probable ; or other strong and confirmed *Christians*) to the exercise of len ty and meekness towards their *weaker* brethren ; who by reason of their weakness in the faith, or want of a through instruction, are more subject to be seduced into errors ; and through surprize, or ignorance, or prevalency of strong temptations, to fall into sin ; that they may be seasonably restored, and knit again by gentle usage, as sound members, to the body of *Christ*. Now if any man shall think himself too great, or too good, to condescend to so mean an office, as to help up and support his weak brother, ready to sink under his burden ; or is rather ready to lay on more load by his too severe deportment towards him, or censuring of him : If any one shall be so swoln up with conceit of himself, and of his own growth and strength in grace, as to despise such underlings, whilst he himself is subject to the same infirmities, and may come to stand in need of the like tenderness and compassion from others : such an one as this forgets himself too much, and takes himself to be *something*, when indeed he is *nothing* ; He considereth not (as he ought) the infirmities of human nature, neither the imperfections of grace in this life. He considereth not, how that he himself is but a frail and sinful man, and subject to the like temptations ; from the power whereof if he have been hitherto preserved more than some others, he owes not his safety to any strength of his own, which he hath cause to boast of above other men ; but to something, which he received of *God's* free and undeserved gift, and is bound to return all possible thanks to him only, who can, whensoever he will, give as good a gift to the very meanest of his most despised servants. And
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therefore men of this haughty and overweening spirit, which makes them look with such a scornful eye on all those that stand below them being (what they are least apt to consider) in the vilest condition that can be, even very slaves to that lordly tyrant in their breasts the *spiritual pride* of their own hearts, do most wretchedly *deceive themselves* : their own *mind* or *spirit* (as the word there imports) deceiveth them.

Par. You have given me several clear instances of *Self-deceit* ; and in these texts I have seen it as it were diversely exemplified ; and perceive how it works in sundry sorts of persons, according to their several tempers and inclinations to vice or vanity. Have you any more to add out of the Scripture to the same purpose ?

Min. Yes ; it will be now very seasonable to commend unto you that caution which the same *Apostle* giveth the *Corinthians* (1 Cor. iii. 18.) *Let no man* (saith he) *deceive himself* ; *if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.* Here is a very needful caution, and, we may be sure, there was great need of it among those *Christians*, to whom it was given ; the *Apostle* warned them not to take heed of a thing which was not dangerous. In his opinion, a man may *deceive himself*, and may lead himself out of the way, or seduce himself, as the word he here used importeth. A man may put a cheat upon his own soul, and make himself mistake a falshood for a truth. He may think himself *wise* when he is a *fool*, and must be so far undeceived of himself, as to see and acknowledge that what he accounted his *wisdom*, was his *folly* ; and learn to have a lower opinion of himself before he can be wise indeed. The *Caution* is here given more expressly to one sort of men, because they of all men most need it, as being of all men, through

an excessive fondness of their own imaginary wisdom, most apt to *deceive themselves*. Mens high thoughts of their own supposed excellencies, set them, in their own account, out of the reach of all deceits ; unto which others through their simplicity and dulness are exposed. And truly, no men are in more danger of being deceived, than they who think themselves too wise to be deceived : this very *confidence* being itself a most notorious *Self-deceit*. Some men are inclined to think, upon very slender grounds, that they have attained to such measures of knowledge and wisdom, as the shallowness of other mens capacities cannot contain ; and they are wont to hug themselves mightily in this pleasing conceit, of an ability to dive into those mysteries and profundities, which most men besides themselves are too weak-headed so much as once to look into ; and by this *pride* and *confidence*, and *security*, they lay themselves open to all that they despise. Among the *Corinthians*, to whom *St. Paul* here speaketh, there was a company of such *wise-fools*, who became the ringleaders of factions, broachers of strange doctrines, and authors of divisions in the *Church*. These thought it below them to learn of *St. Paul* ; and disdained to be looked upon, as men fit for no more, but to be his assistants or fellow-labourers. They would be thought sufficiently qualified to be master-builders, and every one of them able enough to set up for himself, as the head of a new sect or party. Some esteemed the *preaching of the cross* (which was *St. Paul's* great work) to be *foolishness*, 1 Cor. i. 18. : whether by that be meant, the preaching of a crucified *Jesus*, as the only *Saviour* of sinners ; or the preaching of the *Christian's* duty of bearing the *cross*, and enduring all *sufferings* patiently and chearfully for his sake. These *wise men* would have the world believe it a
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very ridiculous thing, to hope for *salvation* by a *suffering Saviour*; and that a far cheaper and easier way to heaven might be found, than that which lieth thro' much tribulation and suffering. Come but after them, and they will shew you a far pleasanter path, wherein you may walk securely, without fear of losing any thing in this world, which your carnal hearts can desire; and yet make sure of all that is to be hoped for in the world to come. By the course that most men now-a-days take, we may easily conjecture, how welcome and obliging such doctrine as this would be with the far greater number of mankind. We usually love this world, and the things that are in this world so well, that we are very unwilling to part, tho' but with some small share of them even for heaven itself; how ready then would we be to hearken unto him, that could put us into any reasonable hope, that we may keep all these things as long as we live, and yet have all the joys of heaven when we die? No man either will, or ought to make it his choice, when he seeth no need for it, to live in want, or disgrace; or under daily sufferings; or in continual apparent danger of death. Therefore are we ready to catch, with greediness, at any the least colour or shadow of reason, to persuade ourselves, that we may use what shifts we will to escape all these hated evils, and be safe enough for all that at last. But whosoever he be that would flatter himself, for his lust's sake, with such a hope as this, his *wisdom* will shew itself in the end to have been the extreme *folly*; and he must in time become such an one, as he now calls a fool, *that is*, one that regardeth not greatly how little wise he be for this present world, so that he may be found wise indeed unto salvation, or he will find at the last day, that he hath most wretchedly *deceived* and *befooled himself*.

Par. I am very sensible of this truth, and I cannot chuse now, but exceedingly wonder at myself, that seeing these things are laid so plainly open before our eyes in *God's word*, I should all this while take so little notice of them. But, alas! though sometimes, when we have little else to do, we read the Scripture; yet we read it hastily and unconsideringly, as a thing wherein we are not greatly concerned; and as if, like children, all our business were to learn to read it. We enquire not how we understand it, we little think what use we are to make of it, we take not time to examine our hearts and lives by it: but when we have read a few chapters, we lay by the book, and all thoughts of what we have read together, and go about our worldly pleasures and businesses; and thinking we have served *God* well enough by reading awhile, we know not what, we fall to serving ourselves, not according to *his* will, but our *own*. And thus are we very little better for what we read.

Min. I wish that what you now so freely confess of yourself, be not the common custom of too many: and where it is so, I must tell you, you are so little the better, that you are much the worse for reading; seeing you mightily dishonour *God*, and abuse his goodness to your souls, when you so slight his *word*, and regard it less when you read it, than you would do a tale of *Robin Hood*.

Par. It is, *God* knows, too sad a truth. And another piece of my own folly I now also discern; which is, that I have made so little use of *God's Ministers*, and consulted them so little about the great concerns of my soul. For by what I find in the little discourse that I have now had with you, I cannot but see how great an advantage it would be to us, if we would oftener converse in private with our spiritual guides, and freely un-

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bosom ourselves unto them, accepting willingly their help, both to bring us to a good understanding of *God's word*, and to discover to us our sin and our duty by it, and to direct us how to live according to it.

Min. By this, *neighbour*, you put me in some hope, that I shall have more of your company hereafter ; and seeing you begin to be so sensible of the benefit of this course, I hope you will not be wanting in charity to your neighbours, but persuade them all you can to do as you do. Nothing would make my living among you more comfortable to me than this. But shall we now proceed to some of those other points of instruction, which I promised you ; or consider some more passages in *Scripture*, concerning this we are now upon ?

Par. It is very pleasant to me, to observe how copious the *Scripture* is in those things which so nearly concern our *happiness*. And therefore if you have any more places of it in your memory to the same purpose, I cannot be weary of hearing them explained unto me.

Min. They are so many, that I cannot now point out to you one half of them : but some few I shall commend to your observation. Take notice what *St. Paul* saith to the *Corinthians* again, (1 Cor. vi. 9.) *Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.* Let now all those that live in the common practice of any of these sins, here mentioned (if such sins have left any seriousness in them) seriously consider what they are told, and bethink themselves, if they can, what they have to say for themselves, why they should not be counted *Self-deceivers*. To omit the rest, be-
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cause I hope they are more rarely found among us, shall no *fornicator*, nor *adulterer*, shall no *thief*, *covetous* person or *extortioner* ; shall neither *drunkard* nor *reviler* enter into the kingdom of God ? Then tell me, how you think any such as these (and you cannot but know many such in the neighbourhood) can pretend to free themselves from *Self-deceit* ?

Par. I confess I know not, except they will say, that they hope *St. Paul* may be deceived in this his so severe censuring of them.

Min. Indeed he must be so, if such as they go to heaven ; but if they think so, then is this their *Self-deceit*. And if they think, that there is no such thing as a *kingdom of God* to enter into, they must think also, that there is no *God*, as none but the *fool* doth, and foolishly they *deceive themselves* in that : or if they say, that they are not guilty of these sins, when 'tis most visible that they are, how can they more *deceive themselves*, than by so thinking ? Well therefore doth the *Apostle* warn us to take heed how we be cheated out of heaven, and that by ourselves.

Par. He warns us indeed, to beware of being deceived ; but he doth not bid us beware of *deceiving ourselves*.

Min. You say that, which I expected to hear. They that love to cavil (as all they do, that love their sins) will be sure to object this, that when the *Apostle* saith, *Be not deceived*, his meaning is, that we should take heed, that we be not drawn into error by others. That we should not think ourselves infallible, but use that caution which becometh men that live among seducers ; and may, if they be not careful, be led by them out of the way, and brought by their subtil reasonings to believe a lye. But tho' this were all the *Apostle* meant, what are such men the better, whilst they live

live in the practice of such sins as they know are damnable? If they were, at *first*, seduced into them by others, do they not now by continuing in them, and yet hoping for heaven, deceive themselves, as much as others deceived them at first? I know that *Satan* hath too many instruments abroad, who are very industrious in the cursed trade which he hath taught them, of making *profelytes* to hell; yet *God* hath of his goodness so abundantly provided against our being deceived by them, in the things which are necessary to our everlasting happiness, that no man living under the *Gospel* of *Christ* can be deceived in these things, but by a wilful neglect of those helps which *God* hath afforded him; and therefore must be the cause of his own error. Our willingness to hearken to seducers, and the love we bear to the things unto which they invite and allure us, is that indeed which deceiveth us. It is this desire to serve our lusts, that makes us so ductile and easy to be imposed upon. It is not any strength of argument, or any great appearance of reason, which these seducers use (though they pretend to be the great masters of reason) that could prevail with us, to be so mad, did not the inclinations of our own corrupt hearts, ready to call every pleading for what we love by the name of reason, first blind us so that we become unable to distinguish betwixt real and apparent colours. We have an earnest longing, and therefore we are ready to hope upon the slenderest grounds, that the things which we long for will not hurt us, but that we may even eat poison and yet live eternally.

Par. You have satisfied me in this, and now be pleased to go on to what else you think fit to be observed by me.

Min. In the same *Epistle* to the *Corinthians*,
St. Paul

St. Paul discoursing largely of the *Resurrection* from the dead, giveth them the like warning again, (1 Cor. xv. 33.) *Be not deceived* (saith he) *evil communications corrupt good manners.* Some there were among these *Corinthians*, that would not believe there should be a *Resurrection* from the dead, or a future state of retribution, and rewarding every man according to his deeds after the end of this present life. These men, as those *Epicureans* and *Stoicks* at *Athens*, the famous wits of that age (*Acts* xvii. 18.) did, without all doubt, bustle hard to persuade the young *Christians* at *Corinth*, to account *St. Paul's* talk of a *Resurrection* no better than a vain babbling; and where they were not able to reason the point with himself, would yet be impudent enough (as it is now too much the mode of such grave *philosophers*) to laugh his followers out of their faith. *St. Paul* here as good as confesseth, that if there were no *Resurrection*, as they contended, he were a very babbler indeed; whilst by a vain preaching, he endeavoured to beget in them as vain a faith, *ver. 14.* He could have nothing to say against it, why they should not esteem him as very a fool, as they desired he should be taken for. For what a folly were it to expose himself daily to manifold sufferings, having no reason to hope for a future reward? If it be thus, then saith he, let us all turn *Epicures*, *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* Life is short, and there is nothing after death; let us not therefore lose all the pleasures of this life, in vain hopes of another which will never be; if we must die and rot like swine, let us live like swine too, and eat up our swillings whilst they are sweet. But take heed (saith he) *evil communications corrupt good manners.* Let no man persuade you, my beloved *Christians*, for the love of a little drasse, to lose the bread which is
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in your heavenly Father's house. Be not too bold in conversing with these crafty sophisters, that go about to cheat you out of your eternal inheritance. They have a cunning way of inticing discourse, whereby they hope to insnare easy tempers, and to hamper those that are called good-natured men, inclined to be too sociable and complaisant with their company. He therefore warneth such to be cautious, and to shun the familiarity of these men; lest they should be at length infected by them, and *deceive themselves*, for want of considering the corruption of nature; and by taking sin for no infectious disease. It is a disease, whereof if men once become sick, in like manner as these deceivers were, so that they have once a greedy appetite to the food of their lusts, they will soon begin to rave and talk at the same idle rate as they did.

Par. I am very sensible of the danger of ill-company, and how men of soft and easy natures are insensibly drawn in thereby to wickednesses, which they once thought they could never have been tempted to. Have you yet any more to add?

Min. I shall exercise your patience but with one text more, and then shall dismiss you for this time. It is in the *Epistle to the Galatians*, where *St. Paul* exhorting them to contribute liberally to the maintenance of their spiritual teachers, who instructed them in the word of truth and life, he stirreth them up thereunto by this argument. *Gal. vi. 7, 8. Be not deceived, (saith he) God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting.* If I should now be very particular in explaining these words unto you, it may be you would tell me,

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that

that I seek not you, but yours; and that the main end I drive at is, under a colour of shewing you your *Self-deceit*, to deceive you out of your estates, and enrich myself with them.

Par. I know what you mean; and had you begun with this text first, it is like enough I might have suspected as much as you say: and therefore you have dealt cunningly enough, whatever your design is, in reserving it to this place. I have already so good an opinion of you, that whatever others do, I verily think you aim much more at our spiritual good, than your own temporal and worldly profit.

Min. I have cause to thank you for that. And I believe you so much, that I will venture to speak my mind to you very freely. You cannot but know, that this duty of freely contributing to the maintenance of the *Ministry*, is a duty that is as hardly digested by most of you, as any duty whatsoever. What men think of the *Apostle*, for telling them of it, I know not; but this I am too sure of, that if I, or any other *Minister* should press this duty, though with all the moderation we can think of, upon the men of this generation; we should be so far from persuading them to do it as they ought, that we should reap no other fruit of our pains, than to be hardly thought of, as covetous, self-seekers and hirelings, or as if we came among them with no better design, than to hold them busied in these pretended discourses of piety, till we may cut their purses. Men are generally as cunning to deceive themselves in this branch of *Christianity*, the free communicating of their substance and worldly goods in pious and charitable uses, as they are vigilant and diligent in guarding their houses and treasures against thieves and robbers; and think that no part of their estate is more vainly spent, or foolishly thrown
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thrown away, than what is thus laid out for the honour of religion and the good of their souls. What a multitude of crafty shifts have they always ready at hand to evade this unwelcome command ; to silence their own consciences, so as they shall never give them the least check for any transgression of it, and to persuade themselves that God is very well pleased with any the smallest mite, which they cast into the treasure of the *Sanctuary*, though it be so far from being all their substance, as the poor widow's was, that it is hardly as a drop out of the ocean ?

Par. I hope you are not prompted by your own experience to say thus. For my part, I pay you your dues honestly : and I have heard others say, that for the pains you take among us, you are very well rewarded with the tythes of all our increase ; that for which we are, I am sure, at great pains and cost too, before it be made ready for you. Yea, they are ready to say, when you are too free of your reproofs, that a man would think you had enough to stop your mouth with, so as to let them live quietly by you, that pay so dear to feed you.

Min. Here indeed you touch upon that, which toucheth most of you to the quick, and fetches blood from your very hearts. Could men but save their tythes, how well could they be content that we should spare our pains ! So they may have bread enough and to spare in their own houses, they would not be much concerned to see a famine of the word in *God's* house. Rather than we should share with them in any small part of their earthly things, they could be very well satisfied, that we should keep our spiritual things to ourselves, yea, though their souls in the mean time famish and die for want of the bread of life ; which indeed they set so little by, even whilst they

complain

complain they pay so dear for it, that they will hardly be prevailed with to receive it, but are angry to have it thrust into their mouths. How much of this I am taught by my own daily experience, I am loth to tell you. But I am very sorry, not for my own sake, but yours (whether you will believe me or no) to see so many among you of this mind. It is a thing too visible almost every where, that so long as the *Minister* is not strict in calling for his dues, but is content with that very little which men are willing to give him; and especially if he will be neighbourly and sociable, as they call it, and keep them company in their sins, or at least not give himself the trouble to tell them of them, he is a very good man, and they think themselves happy in him: but let him begin once to do his own duty in calling upon them to do theirs, and talk of paying debts, and giving every one his due; if he call upon them to give to *God* his due worship and service, and to *God's Minister* his due reverence and maintenance, and, in a word, to their own souls their due care; he shall presently feel their affections growing cold, and be called a troublesome and overbusy man, a coverous fellow, and what not?

Par. But will you, by the way, satisfy me in one point? Do you think indeed that the *tytbe* of what you have is your due by *divine right*, and that we are bound by the law of *God* to pay you just so much?

Min. Whether it be or no, it is not at all material to what we are now about. Yet, to satisfy you, as you know I never demanded them as due by such right; so I really think it is much harder to prove such a divine right than some imagine it to be: and therefore I shall ever be very wary of laying snares for mens consciences, by asserting

ing a divine right, where I cannot clearly discern it. It is well, if some do not dispute themselves out of all right by contending too earnestly for the divine right. But I will tell you a certain truth that will as nearly concern you, and ought to satisfy you.

Par. Let me hear, that I beseech you.

Min. It is that which *St. Paul* tells you (1 *Cor.* ix. 14.) that *God hath ordained, that they which preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.* And again (*Gal.* vi. 6.) that he that is taught in the word, should communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

Par. I hear this, and believe it. And therefore I think you are to be content with a *voluntary contribution*, and cannot demand of us any certain quantity, but what we think good to give you.

Min. But you will grant, I hope, that it must be *voluntary* in this sense only, that it must be *willingly* performed, as a duty commanded by *God*, and not as a thing which is left to your own choice to do or not do without danger of sin. And as to the *quantity*, that it must be a *sufficient maintenance*, so as we may live upon it, and that as *Ministers* of the *Gospel*, enabled thereby to maintain ourselves and our families, that we may not be *intangled* with the affairs of this life, 2 *Tim.* ii. 4. But being free from the distracting cares of providing for ourselves and our children, may attend wholly upon the work of the ministry.

Par. That indeed is very reasonable.

Min. Therefore it was the care of our pious ancestors, in compliance with this ordinance of *God*, to provide, that *God's Ministers* should not be left to an uncertainty; and either to go from door to door to beg an alms, or to fast at home, till men would all be so good *Christians* as to bring them in things necessary; but that they should have a

certain portion out of every man's estate settled upon them by the same law, by which men hold their estates. Which portion, though it be far short of that which *God* himself thought fit of old to appoint to this purpose, yet is it so much, that most of you think it too plentiful a provision, and are ready to impute it not to the *piety*, but to the *superstition* of your forefathers. Most men accounting the cheapest religion to be always best.

Par. You have however, the *tylbe*, what would you have more?

Min. Whether it be a *tenth*, or more, or less, we desire no more but what is by law become our right, and you are bound in conscience to pay, seeing you are bound to obey the laws of men for conscience sake, *Rem.* xiii. 5. For this law, as in many other cases human laws are to be accounted, is indeed become the law of *God*, inasmuch as it only determineth the measure, where *God* had expressly commanded the thing. *God* hath commanded a sufficient maintenance; now if we will be judges what is sufficient, you will suspect us as partial to ourselves; if you would be left to assign the proportion, every one of you for himself, it would be little enough: it becomes therefore the *Magistrate* as a *Christian* to see the laws of *Christ* effectually executed, and to that end to determine what we would never agree in. This is done in this *nation*, and with the consent of your own *representatives*, and so you are both by *divine* and *human* law bound to pay the portion appointed.

Par. And so we think we do.

Min. You may possibly *deceive yourselves* in so thinking: in some places, it may be, a full *tenth* is paid; but in many places not a *twentieth*, no nor a *thirtieth*. And in many, all that is paid by you
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is swallowed up wholly by *Impropiators*. But to let you see how well men obey the *apostle*, and *God* speaking by him, I offer to your consideration but these things, which are too obvious. Men are ever ready, with all greediness to lay hold on any *prescription* or *custom* to excuse themselves from paying tythes, at least to the full ; and they will drive such customs as far as possibly they can to lessen their payments. And where no such thing can be pretended to, they have a hundred fraudulent tricks to save themselves in law, and to silence conscience in this case. They that pay, do for the most part pay with much grudging, and will create the *Minister* as much trouble as they can (though they themselves gain nothing by it) in collecting his own. They will not have patience till he can fetch it home conveniently, but rather destroy it, or suffer it to be destroyed, than want a day or two their own conveniency, be it never so small. If they see it like to be spoiled in the mean time, they will not be at any trouble or care to secure it for him. If both for their conveniency, and his own better attendance on his *Ministry*, he would ease himself of the trouble of gathering his tythe, and would let it to them, they will not be satisfied with that convenience, but will make him pay them for their own advantages ; and by taking hold of any pretence, as of the charge they can put him to in getting his own, or of a seeming unhopfulness of the crop, or something else, they will beat him down to their own rates : so that he shall pay dear for, and they gain well by his ease, though it be for their own good. Nay, they will be sure to have as much of it back again from him as they can, by taxing and burdening him as far as they can by law be allow'd to do. All this we have daily experience of, and call you this an obeying of

God's command? Is it not too plain, that whatever pains and cost you are at to maintain us, it is much against your will, and proceeds from your fear of *man's* laws, and not your obedience to God's? Oh how much might you lessen both the *Minister's* and your *own* burden at once, were you indeed sensible what it is to be *Christians*!

Par. I pray, Sir, shew me how?

Min. That's easy to do; and withal to shew you that you are very unreasonable men in not doing it of your own accord. And, without all dispute, you would be very forward to do it, had you any mind to do God's will, and not rather to cheat the *Minister* and your own *souls* at once.

Par. I long to hear it.

Min. I first ask you this question: To what end is this kind of maintenance settled upon *Ministers*?

Par. That, not being troubled with the cares of this world, how to provide for themselves, they may give themselves wholly to the work of their calling, and to provide for our souls.

Min. And you think it reasonable they should do so, do you not? Are you not ready to complain of them, that they mind the world too much?

Par. Many do cry out upon them for that indeed.

Min. Why do not you order the matter so then, that they may have no cause to trouble themselves about worldly things; and that if they do, your complaint of them may appear just, and they without any excuse?

Par. How would you have us order it?

Min. Pay them, without putting them to any farther trouble, the full value of their tythes yearly, without any fraud or defalcation; so are you eased of all inconveniencies attending their gathering of them, which you are apt to grumble at; you are

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at a certainty, and are not, from year to year, in suspense what husbandry to make, or how to bargain anew; they know what they have to trust to, and how to order their expences; all occasions of quarrelling and law-suits are avoided; their business is to attend to their calling of the *Ministry*, and yours to reap the fruit of it; you live in mutual love and kindness, without temptation on either side to violate that friendship; and if they do not their duty, they are without excuse if you seek to cast them out, and get others that will be more faithful to you.

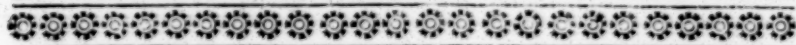
Par. I confess, that all this that you say, seems very reasonable, and plainly more for our advantage than your own.

Min. Then you see how forward you have been hitherto to *deceive yourselves* in this matter. But let all crafty jugglers know, that *God* giveth them by his *apostle* a fair warning to take heed what they do. In shuffling off this duty with so much subtilty, they act altogether like men that have a mind to mock and put a cheat upon the all-seeing *God*, as if he could not see what lay in the heart. They do but shew themselves witty to mischief themselves. When they have done all they can, and much more than enough, to *deceive themselves*, and have cast such a mist before their own eyes, that they are not able to discern betwixt their own loss and profit, any more than betwixt their duty and their sin, yet can they never cheat *God*, and make him believe, as they are willing to believe themselves, that they have done what was either their duty or their interest to do. Men think there is no good husbandry but in *sowing to the flesh*, and *making provision for it to fulfil the lusts thereof*; but *God* will make them feel at last, to their sorrow, the bitter fruits of this good husbandry. Then shall they see and curse
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their own folly, when all the dirty tricks that they have put upon their own souls, and whereby they did whatever they could to *mock God* also, shall be laid open to themselves, and to all the world. They will then sadly find how treacherously they have dealt with themselves, and how, by an unreasonable fondness to the world, and indulgence to the flesh, they have ruined themselves eternally.


Par. You have now abundantly performed this part of your promise. It is time for me now to leave you to your studies, with this expectation, that within a few days I am likely to give you a new trouble.

Min. Farewel, neighbour, and be as good as your word.



S E C T. III.

*No man perisbeth eternally, but by
SELF-DECEIT.*

Par. OU see, *Sir*, I am as good as my word, especially when I promise a trouble, I rarely fail to make good my promise.

Min. Such troubles are very pleasant to me. Come, let me know what it is wherein you now desire satisfaction.

Par. According to your propounded method, having shewn that there is such a thing as *Self-deceit*, you should *next* shew how subject we all are to this disease. But before you come to that,
I shall

I shall desire, if it be not unseasonable, that you make me understand a little better something that you said lately (as I remember) to this sense, that no man can perish eternally, but by Self-deceit.

Min. I did not, I think, say those very words, but only something that you might possibly so interpret. And indeed the thing is very true; nor will it be amiss to shew you now that it is so; for this will make our way the plainer to what we are afterwards to discourse of.

Par. I am glad then that it came so happily into my mind to offer it unto you. Pray, *Sir*, how will you make this appear true?

Min. We are now speaking only of men that live under the light of the Gospel. Do you think that any such men can perish?

Par. I cannot doubt of that; no sin so great as theirs, if they live not according to that light. And that all men, who live under the light of the Gospel, do not walk in the light, I am too sure.

Min. If such men may perish, and they cannot perish any other way, then you will grant, that they can perish only by Self-deceit.

Par. That cannot be denied.

Min. If such a man can perish any other way, it must be by wilfully choosing his own damnation, or by being forced upon it, or by being deceived into it by some other. Can you think of any other way?

Par. No surely; it must needs be by one or other of these three.

Min. Do you think then, that any man can wittingly and willingly choose his own damnation?

Par. I cannot think it possible for any man, that is in his right wits, to do so. But now I think on't, why then do men, notwithstanding

so many warnings given them, so boldly venture upon their own damnation? By this they seem to choose it.

Min. No; this their boldness doth not shew, that they are willing to be damned; but it shews one of these things: Either, *first*, that they are ignorant, and know not what damnation signifies; and there is none, you know, so bold as blind *Bayard*: or, *secondly*, they suppose, that the courses they take do not deserve damnation; or they have some deceitful hope, upon what sandy bottom soever it stands, that they shall, some way or other, escape damnation. No man can be simply willing to be miserable, and choose it rather than to be happy, when both are in his choice. Can any man be in love, do you think, with torments?

Par. I think there are few of that hardy temper.

Min. Much less then can they be in love with, or willing to endure *endless* torments, and the utmost *extremity* of torments in the very highest degree of *pain* and *grief*.

Par. No, it is too much against nature; and if any man should in a *bravado*, as our *boistering Dam-mees* sometimes do, have the impudence to affirm it, I doubt not, but a very easy tryal of his courage would discover his vanity.

Min. *Self-preservation* is that which nature hath taught all men to desire. And we all desire it, not only as it signifieth the *continuation* of our being, but as it signifieth, with that, our *well-being*, without which even our *being* would be intolerable. For, whatever some *metaphysical* heads may dispute to the contrary, were they necessitated to chuse, I little question, but they would then grant it more eligible not to be at all, than to be miserable; and they would not desire the continuation of their
being

being on this condition, that they must for ever remain in the severest of all torments. They that say, that a man ought to be *content* with such a condition, in submission to *God's* will, *first* say nothing to the purpose, for they say only that a man may be *content* with it, not that he would *chuse* it; that a man ought to do it upon the principle of *submission*, not that he can be willing to it by a free and uncontroled *election*: and *next* they speak absurdly, supposing that, which is never to be supposed, that *God* should will such a thing; a thought which no man ought to tempt himself withal. Yea, nature so much abhors the thoughts of enduring torments, that we have known some, and heard of many, who either not considering the torments of hell after death, or else flattering themselves with some kind of hope to escape those future torments, have rather chosen to shorten their own days, and to be their own executioners, than to live any longer under those more tolerable pains and griefs, whether of body or mind, which they have been weary of induring, and could find no other way to be free from.

Par. We have had indeed too many examples of such desperate self-murderers. But do you think no wicked man doth wilfully run upon his own damnation?

Min. All that are damned do thus far wilfully run upon their own damnation, that they wilfully run on in those sins, which certainly bring them to damnation, without repentance. But it is not damnation they choose, but, as I said before, they thus venture, either because they know not what it is, or think their sins not damning, or hope, by a late repentance, by *God's* mercy, or some other way, to escape it. Nay, the wickeder any man is, the less reason have we to suppose him willing to damn himself, if he know
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what damnation meaneth: for tell me what you think it is that tempts a man to commit all wickedness?

Par. What can it be else, but a corrupt and inordinate *Self-love*, and an impotent desire of gratifying the *flsh* in all those things which it lusteth after, and findeth pleasure in?

Min. You say right. And now, supposing this, which cannot be denied, it necessarily followeth, that the wickeder any man is, the less willing can he be to choose everlasting torments, such as utterly exclude the very least imaginable degree of pleasure or ease, and where, in the midst of scorching flames, he cannot expect the very small refreshment, which one single drop of cold *water* may be supposed able to give him, as we are told in the *parable*, *Luke* xvi.

Par. I am sufficiently convinced, that no man can wilfully choose his own damnation. But why may he not be forced upon those torments? And indeed, seeing no man suffers them willingly, I cannot see how it can be otherwise, but he suffers them by force and violence.

Min. It is true, that as he never chose the punishment; so when he suffers it, it is against his will, and he is forced to it: As a man that is hanged for his offence, neither chose to be hanged, nor is hanged willingly, but by force. But I speak not of sinners after death, when they come to judgment and execution, but as they live, and have life and death now set before them. A thief may beforehand choose whether he will steal or no, and so whether he will deserve hanging or no; and none can force him to steal, and to deserve it: so a man may in this life choose whether he will go on or no in sin unto damnation, and nothing can force him to go on unto damnation: for it must be either *God*, or the *devil*, or
some

some other *creature*, that must do this violence to him.

Par. Suppose it may be *God*, who, by his *eternal decree*, hath reprobated him, his decree is irresistible.

Min. You suppose a thing never to be granted, without doing the highest dishonour to our gracious *God*. All that we can know of *God's* holy nature; all that we can read concerning his *will* in his holy *word*; all that we can observe in the gracious methods of his wise *providence* and *government*, do give us all the assurance that we can desire, that *God* doth not, by any such decree, force any man to be miserable. *God* hath told us, that death and damnation are the wages of sin, and the just punishment unto which he condemneth evil-doers. He hath declared, that he will judge the world in righteousness, and having given men a good law to live by, will, in the end, render to every man according to his deeds. Is it possible, that we should have such a thought of *God*, the infinite ocean of perfect goodness, as that he should send men into this world merely to be miserable, and that he should please himself in seeing them so? Can we fancy, that *God*, the perfectly just and gracious *Governor* of the world, that hath published his laws with so express mention of the reward he hath assigned to the keepers, and the penalty to be inflicted on the breakers of it, should condemn men, before they had a being, to those torments, which, by his wise justice, he hath made, and in his word declared to be the punishment of the disobedient only? There can be but one way for *God* to constrain men to be miserable, that is, by constraining them first to continue impenitent in sin, that by their final impenitence they may be fitted for destruction. But to assert that *God* doth force,
constrain,

constrain, or necessitate, or effectually determine men to sin, or whatever softer words some are pleased to anoint so harsh a doctrine with, is to father all the sins of men upon *God*; which is most impious: and then to cast innocent men into hell for no other cause but being innocent, that is, for doing as *God* would have them do, and as they could not choose but do. The doctrine of *absolute Reprobation* hath certainly so little loveliness in its face, that it can have but few admirers of its beauty; and it is a very great wonder, how some good men have chanced to espouse to ill-looking an opinion. However, they that have been unhappily taken by the harlot, most fruitful in a numerous brood of monstrous impieties, are yet ashamed to father, and afraid to foster all those ugly brats, which inseparably follow her at the heels.

Par. I am sure we have been taught this doctrine by some preachers; and I find that very many believe it, and make this use of it, that they conclude it in vain for them to trouble themselves much about the work of salvation, or to labour to assure it to themselves, saying commonly, that if we must be saved, we shall be saved; and if we must perish, we shall perish: if *God* have *owned* us (so the expression is) to salvation or damnation, so it must be; and nothing that we can do, can prevail against his will.

Min. I have been sometimes thus answered, when I have been persuading men to leave their sins, and turn unto *God*. And because I see that this opinion, once rooted in mens heads, renders all our endeavours among them uneffectual to the reformation of their lives, I the more earnestly beg of you to take heed of it. And let me advise you never to trouble your head at all about *God's* secret decrees, but study night and day his revealed

revealed will in his *word*, which is able to make you wise unto salvation. Do you not think, that *God* so speaketh of himself in his word, as he would have us to think and believe of him?

Par. I believe that *God* cannot lye, nor hath caused his word to be written with an intention to deceive us; and therefore, whatever he saith of *himself* in his *word*, I am bound so to believe of him.

Min. Then you cannot choose but see, how much better this doctrine of *absolute Reprobation* suits with the *Alcoran*, than with the *Bible*. And before any man can believe it, or indeed understand that there is any sense in it, he must be taught to boggle at no absurdity, how great soever. Let me ask you one thing more: Do you think that it can be *God's* will, that a man should do that which he hath again and again, with the greatest earnestness in the world, charged men, upon pain of death, not to do?

Par. I must have worse thoughts of *God*, than I can have of any honest man, before I can think so of him.

Min. You know how often and earnestly *God* hath commanded us not to sin. Must it not then be absurd to say, that *God*, with the most efficacious will, hath determined, that we shall sin and perish? Must not so *God* have one will contrary to another? And must we not think he deceives us, when he tells us, he would not have us do what he will have us do?

Par. *God* forbid I should ever have so blasphemous a thought.

Min. If *God* hath declared in his *word*, that no man shall perish but for his sins; and if he hath therein most strictly commanded us to repent of our sins, and to cast them off, that we may not perish; and if sin be a *voluntary* transgression of
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the will or law of God, then we may be well assured, that God hath not laid on us an inevitable necessity of sinning and perishing. He will not punish us, except we deserve punishment; and we cannot deserve punishment by an act which is not of our own choice, but whereof necessity or violence is the cause. Do but well consider one text of Scripture, and you must needs be satisfied in this point, *Ezek. xviii. 32. I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God, wherefore turn your selves, and live ye.* I will add that other place to the same purpose, *Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* Hath not God as freely, fully and affectionately here declared his good-will toward us as we can desire? Mind you therefore, and believe that which God hath so expressly told you, and give no heed to those who tell you things which they themselves cannot understand.

Par. I thank you for your good advice; and I am resolved, by God's assistance, to follow it. I perceive we serve a gracious God, who hath abundantly manifested his wonderful love to our souls. I am well satisfied that it is not long of him that any man perisheth. But may not the devil have such power over men, as to force them upon damnation?

Min. I shall now shew you, that as God will not, so neither can the devil, or any other creature, force a man to be eternally miserable. When men have killed the body, it is the worst that, with all the extremity of violence which they are able to use, they can possibly do unto us; *it is God only that hath power to cast into hell, Matt. x. 28.* And the devil himself, though he be malicious

cious enough, and of great strength, and, *as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour*, 1 Pet. v. 8. yet hath he not the power to cast us into hell. Were his power proportionable to his malice, and could he as easily force us, as he can tempt us, he would soon devour us all. He should not need to go about seeking those whom he may devour, could he devour whomsoever he hath a mind to devour. No, wheresoever he finds a stout resistance, he feels also in himself a want of power to become master of his prey, and is forced to give over the chase, and fly. *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*, is the encouragement that God himself hath given us, James iv. 7. It is very plain, that all the power that the *devil* can have to ruin our souls, he must have it from ourselves, and we must give it him, by yielding to him when we need not. The only way that he hath to undo us, is, by tempting us with one sort of temptation or other, either by way of allurements and flattery, or by way of terror and vexation; and which way soever he take, his success depends upon our choice: He may hunt us to worry us; but he cannot take us, except we will. He can lay the snare, and bait it with what he thinks will intice us into it; he can set the house on fire over our heads, and make the place too hot for us: And what himself can do, he hath taught his tooapt scholars and instruments, which he hath always ready at his service and command, in great numbers, to do the same. Yet it is certain, that neither he nor they can drag us by violence to hell. The snare shall never catch us, if we, by a greedy catching at the bait, fall not into it, or swallow not the hook: it shall not intangle us, if we will *walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise men*, Eph. v. 15; if we will consider our ways and our goings, and not run headlong upon dangers.

gers. The house may fall on our heads, and we may burn to ashes in the flames of it; but though this fire be from the devil, it is not to us the fire of hell, if we kindle it not by our lusts. In a word, *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and inticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,* James i. 14, 15.

Par. You have given me good satisfaction thus far, that God will not, and the devil cannot, force us to be miserable. I need not now ask you whether any thing else have such a power; for if the devil, who is our most potent adversary, have it not, surely nothing less potent can have it.

Min. And from what you have granted, it plainly followeth, that it can be nothing at all but *Deceit*, whereby men perish. For if it be true, that no man willingly chooseth his own damnation; and if it be as true, that nothing forceth or necessitateth men to be eternally miserable, what remaineth, but that whosoever eternally perisheth, perisheth by *deceit* of one kind or other? Men are cunningly inveigled and couzened into such sinful courses, as will certainly, in the end, bring them into that miserable condition unawares, which they would not choose, nor could be forced into. It is then the *deceitfulness of sin*, Hebr. iii. 13. and that only, which can do us so great a mischief. *It is a deceived heart that turneth us aside, that we cannot deliver our souls,* Isai. xlv. 20. The great point which here I know you would be satisfied in, is, who this mischievous deceiver is, by whom we are so wretchedly deceived.

Par. If it be *deceit* alone that can eternally destroy us, as I am convinced it is, it will indeed highly concern us, as we value our own eternal salvation, to find out the *deceiver*, that we may carefully avoid him.

Min.

Min. You say well ; and you may easily find him out, if you will ; you need not stir a foot from home to seek him ; and yet, if you be not very impartial in the search, he may possibly escape undiscovered, and then you are undone.

Par. You would make me believe that he is easy to be found, and yet hard to be found ; I know not what to make of this.

Min. Be but willing in earnest to find him, and he is easily found : but men are generally unwilling to find him so near home, and that makes it hard for them to find him. Every man almost hath so much kindness for himself, that he is loth to suspect himself to be guilty of so much treachery to his own soul. Men are willing it should be thought any thing but themselves. It shall be the *devil*, it shall be the *things* of the *world*, or the *men* of the *world*, or any thing else you will name to them ; yea, some will not stick to say, 'tis *God* himself that deceiveth them, rather than they will own *themselves* to be traitors to their own souls.

Par. I do confess, we are apt to lay the blame on every thing but ourselves ; and every man would fain seem his own best friend. It is common with us to excuse ourselves, by saying, *this*, or *that* deceived us ; but I never yet heard any one complain, that he had deceived his own soul.

Min. Well, let men go on to say what they will, I am bold to say to every sinner, *Thou art the man* that hast done thyself the greatest unkindness that thou couldst fear from thy worst enemy. Thou hast, *Judas-like*, even with a fawning *kiss*, in the most false and treacherous way in the world, through a pretended love to thyself, betrayed thyself into the hands of the devil. It is not *God*, it is no creature, no not the *devil* himself ; but it is thou, thy dear self, O foolish sinner, that art

66 *The SELF-DECEIVER*

false to thyself. As I said before of *forcing*, so now I say again of *deceiving*, *God* will not, and nothing else can deceive us, without our own help, and therefore are we still our own deceivers.

Par. Though I am loth to give you so much trouble, yet I am very desirous to have this made a little plainer to me.

Min. I hope you cannot think that *God* will deceive you.

Par. Far be it from all *Christians* to entertain so black a thought of the most good and gracious *God*. The *eternal truth* cannot deal deceitfully with men.

Min. No; he must first cease to be *true* and *faithful*, that is, he must cease to be *himself*, which is (if I may so speak) the greatest of all impossibilities, before he can deceive his people. He is a *faithful God*, Deut. vii. 9. *He cannot lye*, Tit. i. 2. *He abideth faithful*, he cannot deny himself, 2 Tim. ii. 13. For *God* to be unfaithful, were a kind of denying himself to be *God*.

Par. I cannot indeed conceive it possible.

Min. And were it possible, you must needs conceive it to be infinitely below the great and glorious *Majesty* of the *Almighty God*, to deceive us. Who is there amongst men, that hath at any time recourse to the mean and base arts of guile and deceit, but he only that mistrusteth his own power, and suspecteth himself unable to effect his purposes by plain and open dealing, or else finds matter of shame in what he goeth about, and therefore endeavours by deceit to hide his shame? Can *God* want power? Or can there be in *God* any cause of shame?

Par. He that is *Almighty*, cannot want power to do what he will; and he that is most *Holy*, and *Just*, and *Good*, can have nothing to be ashamed of.

Min.

Min. Indeed God is so far from any purpose of deceiving us, that he hath, if we mind it, left no room for the least suspicion of such a thing. He hath removed carefully out of our way all things that might occasion our hitting on any such thought. He hath made it the business of his *Holy Spirit*, by his *Word*, to guide us into all truth, John xvi. 13. and so to arm us beforehand, by the truth, against all the deceivings of others. He hath not only, as there was occasion, left us sundry warnings to take heed to ourselves, lest any man deceive us with vain words, Eph. v. 6. *Lest we be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*, Eph. iv. 14. *Lest we be led away with the error of the wicked*, 2 Pet. iii. 17. but he hath fitted and furnished us with all things needful to that end. He hath put arguments and answers into our mouths against all that deceivers have to say; he hath enabled us to discern through all their fallacies, whereby any of them, whether it be the devil, or men, or the most sly and cunning cheat of them all, our own flesh, would impose upon us. *The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God* (Eph. vi. 17.) is sufficient, if we manage it wisely, to cut in pieces all those knotty snares that are laid to catch us.

Par. God indeed hath done all that could be expected to bring us to the knowledge of the truth. But there are, notwithstanding, so many deceivers abroad, that it is hard to escape being deceived by some or other of them, especially the devil.

Min. It is none of all these deceivers, no not the devil himself, that old serpent, which deceiveth the whole world, Rev. xii. 9. together with the assistance of all those his crafty instruments, whom he hath thoroughly instructed in all his arts of de-

ceit, that can deceive those that have not a mind to be deceived. *God* of his infinite goodness hath laid all things of eternal concernment to us so very plainly open before our eyes, that if we do not stubbornly wink, and be not so sturdy, that we cannot be persuaded to open our eyes, we cannot chuse but see them. If indeed we be not absurdly resolved to disbelieve *God*, the *God* of truth, and to give ear and credit to *Satan*, the *father of lyes*, and to his children, that are taught by him the lying trade, we cannot be deceived either in our happiness, or the way to it.

And though this world every where swarms with great multitudes of seducing spirits, watching all fittest opportunities, and studying all the readiest methods, to deceive us ; yet have we had beforehand such timely warning to beware of them, and their designs and stratagems have been so fully discovered unto us, that they cannot possibly lead us out of the way, except we be resolved to follow them blindly, and give heed unto them, as 'tis said some will do, 1 *Tim.* iv. 1. We have a test left us, whereby we are to try the spirits, whether they be of *God*, or no, with a command not to believe every spirit, before sufficient tryal, 1 *John* iv. 1. It is not therefore all the cunning of the most malicious spirit, walk he never so much in the dark, nor any arts, which the father of lyes hath taught his lying children, that can deceive us, unless we resolve to be careless, and to disregard all sure rules, and wise instructions, such as we can never be without, but when we slight them.

And now if the case be thus indeed with us, that no man can wilfully choose to be miserable, that nothing in the world can force a man to be miserable, that nothing but deceit and fraud can bring a man to misery : And next, that *God* will deceive

deceive no man ; and that he hath so ordered all things for us, that neither the *devil*, nor all the *world*, can deceive us, except we will be deceived : then nothing remaineth, but that all that perish, perishing through *deceit*, must needs also *deceive themselves*, and it is *Self-deceit* alone that can bring us to eternal misery.

Par. And yet, methinks, this cannot chuse but seem a very strange thing, that men, indued with reason, should thus *deceive themselves*.


Min. You may well think it so, when you consider it thoroughly, that men, who have understanding and reason within them, who have so plain and clear a rule, as is *God's* written word, without them, who may have for asking and receiving, the *divine Spirit* to guide them ; that they, before whose eyes *Heaven*, and all its most desirable and ravishing joys and glories, and *Hell*, with all its most dreadful and intolerable pains and torments, are so clearly displayed and laid open ; yea, that *they*, for whom an open way is made by the mercy of *God*, through the precious blood of his only begotten Son, *Jesus Christ*, to fly from all that is most terrible, and come to all that heart can desire ; to whom this way is so fully described in the *Gospel* of *Christ*, so highly commended in the *example* of *Christ*, so undeniably lovely in itself considered, and who have so many most earnest invitations, and most encouraging promises given them, to enter into it, to walk in it, to persevere unto the end, and be happy : that *men*, under all these *helps*, *privileges* and *motives*, should yet be content, nay even *delight*, to *deceive themselves* out of all possibility of being happy, and to do that unspeakable mischief to themselves, which is not left by *God* in the power of any other to do them ; this must needs seem very strange, and almost incredible. And yet thus it is, and thus it

will be: Men both are, and will be their own worst enemies, as I would now farther shew you, but that I am not willing to hold you too long at once, lest you should grow weary, and afford me your company the seldomer.

Par. You need not fear that. But it is not fit I should keep you too long from your study; I will therefore, for this time, take leave.

S E C T. IV.

*We are all naturally very subject to
SELF-DECEIT.*

Min.  YOU are come very conveniently, neighbour; I am just now at leisure; what is it you have now a mind to discourse of?

Par. I shall be ruled by you in that. But by the method you at first laid down, you should now shew how forward men are to *deceive themselves*.

Min. Are you in any doubt whether they be so or no?

Par. That some are so, I doubt not; but I hope they are not very many, and I think I have cause to be confident that I am not of the number. I do not find that I have any inclination to *deceive myself*, but am very desirous to know the truth which is after godliness, and to walk according to it.

Min.

Min. I wish you may prove to be as good as you think yourself, and as true to your own soul. But that mankind are generally very prone to *deceive themselves*, even in the things wherein it most nearly concerns them not to be deceived, is a thing that can need but few words to make it evident. It too openly discovereth itself to every observing eye. *Experience* is a certain proof which can never be evaded; the thing, which we daily see with our eyes, most certainly is; and here we cannot want this kind of evidence. Remember what was proved to you the last time you were here, *that no man perisheth, but by deceit; and that no man is deceived in things necessary to his salvation, but by himself.*

Par. I well remember it, and readily grant it.

Min. Will you then grant me this in the next place, That men are daily walking on in the way that leads to destruction?

Par. That, alas! is too true, and it pities me at the very heart to see it.

Min. Do you not also think, that many of these, who walk so fast in the way to death, are willing to believe that they are in the way to life?

Par. I think I might grant you that also; for otherwise I cannot imagine how they should go on so confidently as they do.

Min. In the next place, I would know of you, if you do not think, that many of them, even after they have been convinced that they walk in a wrong way, do not yet flatter themselves with hope of obtaining eternal life, though they still go on in the same way?

Par. I cannot yet tell you well what I think of that; it seems to call for a little more consideration. And though I doubt not at all of the *first* of these three things you have asked me, nor

much of the *second*, yet, if you please to lay them open a little plainer before me, it may help me to answer better your *third* question.

Min. That *first* thing which you grant, is this, That men are daily going out of the way of life, and walking in the way that leads to eternal death. *Strait is the gate* (saith the blessed Saviour of the world) *and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it : But wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat,* Matt. vii. 13, 14. And may we not say now, as St. John did of the days he lived in, *The whole world lieth in wickedness,* 1 John v. 19. So very few there be, that live like *Christians*, that they are hardly visible in the world. This is, God knows, a very melancholy subject to discourse of ; and we cannot, but with heavy hearts, and more tears than words, talk of it. Tell me what it is that you take to be the only way to life ?

Par. The very same which *Jesus Christ* hath shewn us in the *Gospel*, which is the glad tidings of *Salvation*.

Min. 'Tis very true, there is no other way to heaven but this, and a very brief summary description of it is given us by St. Paul in these few words ; *Faith which worketh by love,* Gal. v. 6. That is, such a *belief* of God's Nature and Attributes, and more especially of his Love and Mercy, tendered freely to us miserable sinners in the Son of his Love *Jesus Christ*, the only Mediator between God and Men, as filleth the heart with a Love to God above all Loves, and by that Love engageth the soul in a cordial and full consent to the whole will of God, and in a free and entire subjection to his government by his Son *Jesus Christ* ; trusting all our concerns temporal and eternal in *Christ's* hand, whilst we go on resolvedly to seek not our own will

will or honour, but *God's* only. Is not this it you mean by the way of life?

Par. This must be the way; but, alas! few of us think of it as containing in it all this that you have now in these few words expressed.

Min. Whatever you think of it, it is no less than I have now said. And thereby it is easily seen, that the far greatest part even of *professing Christians* are altogether, and even the *best* of us as yet too much out of the way. How far are most of us from the life of *Faith*? How few among us feel our hearts kindly warm'd and softened with the *Love of God*? How few discover any thing of this divine affection, by their *zeal* for *God's* honour, their fervent desire and sedulous endeavour that *God* in all things may be glorified through *Jesus Christ*? Look abroad a little into the world, and tell me if you do not see the *lusts of the eyes*, and the *lusts of the flesh*, and the *pride of life*, mentioned 1 *Joh.* ii. 16. set up, and worshipped as the common *idols*, standing visible to every eye in most of our houses? And if you do not find, that all the daily cares and labours of most men and women, old and young, high and low; their time, their strength, their estates, their wits, and all they have, are most freely offered and dedicated to the service of these, and that in so notorious and visible a manner, that he must needs judge against the sight of his own eyes, that can think any better of them? If the *love of the world*, and of the things that are in the world (condemned 1 *Joh.* ii. 15.) be a sign that we love *God*, and are in the way to life, we are well enough. But if *self-denial* be a proper badge of *Christ's* disciples, as we are told it is, *Mat.* xxvi. 24. then whose disciples most of us are, it is but too easy to see. If *loving of enemies*, and *forgiving of injuries*, and *rendering of good for evil*, go in to make up

up the *Christian's* character, as it is plain they do, *Mat.* v. 44. vi. 14. and *Rom.* xii. 20, 21. Then are most of us very odd kind of *Christians*. If the *Christian's affections are to be set on things above, and not on things on the earth*, *Col.* iii. 2. If a *Christian must walk by faith, and not by sight*, *2 Cor.* v. 7. If he must make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, *Rom.* xiii. 14. If he must deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, *Tit.* ii. 12. If none of them that give themselves to do the works of the flesh, reckoned up *Gal.* vi. 19, &c. shall inherit the kingdom of God, ver. 21. If all this be true, is it not too sadly visible that men are daily going on in the way to destruction?

Par. It is indeed so visible, that if they were not wilfully blind, they could not chuse but see it themselves.

Min. You say well; and now I will shew you how it is no less visible, that these men who are so far out of the way of life, are yet willing to believe that they are in it: otherwise, as you said but now, it would be even unconceivable, how so many should possibly be prevailed upon by all the charms either of ambition, or pleasure, or worldly profit, or any thing else which the world can offer, to hold on so long in a way which they verily believe will in a very short time carry them from all those things which now they love, and for which they now walk in it, and bring them to the worst that they can fear, eternal destruction of both soul and body. Though therefore they be in the *broad way*, and may see it if they will, yet are they not willing to see it. Though you shew them never so plainly in what dangerous paths they walk, yet they are resolved not to see it, nor to be convinced that they are going towards hell. Try it when you will, and you will find it as I say. Go to a *proud* person, man or woman, and see if you

you can persuade any of them to see their own *pride*; yea, even then, when all that see them can very hardly discern any thing else in them but pride, and you shall soon find how hard a task you have undertaken. You may easily point out to such a man his *pride* almost in every thing, in every action, but you will not easily make him see it in any of them. Shew it him in his cloaths upon his back, shew it him in his meat upon his table, shew it him in his house, and in his retinue and attendants, shew it him in his stubborn behaviour towards his superiors, in his slight regard of his equals, in his scorn and disdain towards his inferiors, yet will he not see it in any of these. *Lastly*, shew him his pride in his unwillingness to see and confess his pride, in his anger and disdain to be told he is proud, all is in vain, he is blind after all this; his pride itself stands in his light so, that he cannot see it because 'tis there. As hard a task you will find to persuade a worldly-minded man that he is *covetous*, or a voluptuous man, that he is a luxurious *epicure* or a *swine*. They will have no eyes to see their own deformities. Any one of these knows well enough what you say when you call him by any of these his proper names; he understands what you mean by a *covetous muckworm*, by a *voluptuous swine* or *epicure*; he is as ready to condemn the sins these names signify, and abhorreth the very names of them, as much as you can do. We will readily grant, that such sinners are deservedly odious and abominable to *God* and *man*, and that their end, without repentance, will be destruction. Yet all this seems nothing to concern him, you cannot make him see that the things which he practiseth and is most delighted with, are those very sins, or that such names do signify any such thing as you see in him. He hath softer names for these things of a much pleasanter

pleasanter sound, and hath fair colours and pretences so many and plausible for every thing that he practiseth, that he cannot acknowledge himself guilty of what you charge upon him. He will tell you that you mistake yourself, and that the things which are justly branded with such names in others, are not so in him, because others want the excuses and colours which he hath.

Nay, there is nothing more ordinary, than to hear a proud man declaim most severely against the pride of others, or to hear a covetous man speaking most contemptuously of the baseness and niggardliness of others. So quick-sighted are most men to discern, and so tender-eyed also pretend they to be in beholding, as they say, with pity, even the smallest motes in the eyes of their neighbours, whilst the beams themselves which are in their own eyes make them as blind as moles at home, and they cannot see them both for their greatness and their nearness.

Thus is it also in many other vices, which, whatever they will call them in others, men will by no means be brought to see in themselves. Though when they see not near one half so much in another as really is in themselves, they think it enough why they may boldly censure such an one to be extremely wicked: yet shall you be thought very uncharitable and unjust, if you, for the greatest sins you see them practise and love, shall say so much, as that you fear that they are no good *Christians*; as if they thought a *less* sin were enough to make men *wicked*, but a *greater* would make them good *Christians*. If again you observe how such men behave themselves in those things which, rightly performed, are *Christian* duties, you shall find it no otherwise. Let one of them that is very rich give to some good use some little sorry pittance out of his great abundance, though it be
but

but just so much as may demonstrate to others the *scantness* of his *piety* and *charity*, yet you shall see how he will overvalue himself upon account of such a trifle, and boast himself of it, as of a brave piece of noble bounty : and this he will do even then, when he calleth the greater gift of another man, though of far less ability, a sign of a base and niggardly spirit. Another, that dares make so bold with either his own laziness, or his pleasure, or his business, as to borrow of them so much time as to pray once or twice a day with his lips, will be ready enough thereby to flatter himself into a very high opinion of his own *devotion*, especially if besides this, he keep his hours at *church* or *chapel*. And he that hath got a custom of moving his hat in common civility to his inferiors in rank, will be apt enough to pride himself in the thoughts of his great and exemplary humility. Every little ceremony, or imperfect image and shadow of goodness in ourselves, we are forward, *first* to call something, when indeed it is nothing, and *then* most unreasonably to magnify it from very little to very much, till we become intolerably great in our own conceit. And we are as forward to account all our own faults, be they like mountains, no bigger than mole-hills, either very little slips and infirmities, or rather innocent things essential to human nature. Yea, so conceited, on such mistakes, are we wont to grow of our own goodness, that when we are, in the humblest and mildest way of charity, put in mind of our failings and errors, though it be by those whom *God* hath appointed, and we in words acknowledge to be the guides of our souls, we rant and huff, and call it a saucy impudence, yea, a slander and a reproach, an indignity and an affront not to be endured, and we cannot easily be reconciled to a good opinion of our best friends for
+ dealing

dealing so friendly with us. So very plain do men make it, that they are not only apt to go out of the way, but very desirous also to persuade themselves, that notwithstanding all their wild and extravagant vagaries, they are in the ready way to heaven. So true is that of *Solomon*, Prov. xii. 15. *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.* And that also, Prov. xvi. 2. *All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.*

Par. Thus far I am reasonably well satisfied, but the last thing is that which most sticks with me, that men may be convinced that they are wrong, and yet hope that they are right.

Min. You mistake me, I said no such thing ; it is not possible for a man to think himself at once both right and wrong. But this I say, that men are often convinced, that they are in the wrong way, and yet hope they shall come to heaven at last, though they think not yet of turning into the right way.

Par. How men should be so unreasonable, I think it a very hard thing to conceive.

Min. But that many men are so unreasonable, it is very easy for you to see : so far below our reason hath sin sunk us, that there is nothing so much against all reason, but some sinners even esteem it a bravery to venture upon it. So that what to our reason seemeth almost impossible, that to our experience is become very common and obvious.

Par. But this you talk of, is all one as if a man that knoweth where *London* and *York* stand, and the way to both, should hope to come to *London* by turning his back upon it, and going on still towards *York* ; can any but a madman do this ?

Min. Sinners are indeed madmen, how wise soever they be thought by themselves or the world : and thus they betray their madness by
hoping

hoping to come to *heaven*, whilst they walk on as directly and as fast as they can towards *hell*, and that, whilst they are not ignorant that the way wherein they walk leads directly thither.

Par. I can hardly be persuaded to believe this.

Min. If it be not so, then tell me, if you can, whence it comes to pass, that when we reprove men for their wicked doings, and exhort them to amendment, they put us off with such answers as usually they do; and satisfy themselves so well in doing so, that they are very angry that we will not be satisfied with them too; though they express nothing of any present purpose of amendment? If you have ever talk'd with any of these sinners to this end of reforming them, you cannot be ignorant what they are wont to say for themselves.

Par. God forgive me, I have been very faulty in not doing this part of my duty, so often as I should have done, and therefore am I ignorant what they use to say.

Min. I will tell you then. When we tell such men of their sins, and wish them, as they hope for heaven, to cast them off: if they have not the impudence (as too many of them have) to outface us with a notorious lye, they say thus: We know it (say they) but too well, that this is a sin, and you need not tell us that we do not live and act so well as we should do, *God* forgive us for it, as we hope he will. We ask again, Will *God* forgive you without repentance? They answer presently, We hope we do repent, we are sorry that we can do no better: The *Lord* help us, What would you have us to do? We do as well as we can in such a world as this: We must live among men, and how can we live among them and do otherwise than we do? If we tell them, that they are to make the *Gospel* of *Christ*, and not the example of
+ men,

men, the rule of their life, they can quickly answer; *God* be merciful to us! if all men must be damned that live not according to the *Gospel* of *Christ*, who can be saved? How many, we pray you, do you see live so? Would you damn *christened* men? If we tell them again, that a sincere obedience to the *Gospel* is that without which no man can find mercy with *God*; they will answer, that *God* is merciful, and *Christ* is a sufficient Saviour: and that no man must be saved by a righteousness of his own, but we must all trust to *God's* mercy in *Christ*: We do as well as *God* enables us to do, and we live as well as men can live in such a wicked world as this is, and we must hope the best, and not doubt of *God's* goodness. Tell me, where shall you, amongst the wickedest men that live, meet with one of a thousand, who when you ask him whether he hopeth to be saved, will not very pertly tell you, that he hopeth to be saved as well as the best of you that pretend so much to religion? If you say, that he must first amend his wicked life, he will tell you again, that so he hopes he shall, and doubts not but *God* will save him as soon as any of those that talk so much, and make so great a shew of *godliness*; for he is sure he hath as good and honest a heart, as the best of them all.

Par. Indeed I have heard some plead thus for themselves; but do you think they are convinced that they are in the way to death?

Min. You may know that by their own confession, that they live not as *Christians*, according to the *Gospel*, which they grant to be the way to life; but they hope in something else, which will fail them in the end. But to make this yet clearer to you, let us observe how it discovereth itself, especially in two things: *First*, in such mens coming to the holy *Table* and *Supper of the Lord*. To
what

what end do you think these wicked men come to that holy *Sacrament*?

Par. This they do without all doubt, many of them, because they think it is a means to help them towards heaven, and they hope that *God* will accept of them, and in this *Sacrament* seal unto them the pardon of their sins.

Min. They hope so, and yet do not these men by their going on constantly in the same sinful courses still, plainly declare that they hope for this, whilst they know their sins to be deadly without repentance, and yet endeavour not at all to amend their lives?

Par. This indeed is too true. What is the *second* thing you spake of?

Min. It is a sad instance, *God* knows, and you will, I know, be troubled at the heart to hear it; it is of men departing out of this world by *death*: who, when they are sufficiently convinced that they have spent all their days in wickedness, and have made some slight confession of it, depart hence without any farther shew of hearty repentance, without any sorrow or remorse that can be perceived, or any change of affections: they go as quietly and undisturbedly, yea, and (seemingly) with as full hope and confidence of mercy, as if they had never been guilty of any one sin in all their lives. Their friends are pleased to see them go away (as they use to say) like lambs, and wish that they may have so comfortable a death. If we tell these dying persons what they have to do before they go hence, all that we get out of them for the most part, is this, they hope they do so. They hope they repent, they hope they believe, they hope they are in charity, they hope they do all that is to be done; and if this hoping so, or rather saying so, be not *repentance*, and *faith*, and *charity*, and every thing needful, they shew no

other sign at all of any of them, but so die, hoping (as they say) that *God* will have mercy on them. Now this is a point of time wherein a man would think, that men should be in good earnest ; that men just stepping into eternity, and into their unchangeable condition, should now, if at any time, be serious, and unwilling to deceive themselves ; and therefore if even now, when they are under the hand of the executioner, and ready to receive the stroke of death, they be so apt to flatter themselves with vain hopes, after a confessedly wicked life, and no remorse of conscience for it, it must needs be granted, they are more likely to do so in the days of health, whilst they can relish the pleasures of sin, and think that they have yet day enough before them, so that they need not despair of an opportunity afterwards of correcting in good time whatsoever is yet amiss in themselves.

Par. I thank you, *Sir*, for the pains you have taken to help my understanding in this particular. From what you have said, it now seems very plain to me, that though men be convinced that the ways they walk in are the ways of death, they are yet very ready to hope for life, even whilst they repent not.

Min. Lay then but these three things together which you have now granted, 1. That men walk on daily in the way to destruction. 2. That whilst they do so, they are inclined to think they are in the way to life ; and, 3. That even when they are convinced that they are wrong, yet without any amendment, they please themselves with hopes that all will be well : and say if it be not very clear, that men are very prone and forward to *deceive themselves* in the weightiest concerns of their own souls, which was undertaken by me to clear unto you, and I hope you see it.


Par.

Par. I do so ; God grant me his grace, that I may make a good use of what you have taught me. I will not at this time trouble you any longer, but consider of these things till some other convenient day.



S E C T. V.

Whence this evil inclination proceeds.

Par.  I R, if your business will permit, I am very desirous at this time to have a little more of your help. I am thoroughly convinced that men are apt to *deceive themselves* ; yea, I find it so in some measure with myself, and I cannot but exceedingly wonder at it. Certainly it must needs be a most unreasonable thing, and men are reasonable creatures. I have been much musing with myself, whence it then proceeds that we should act so contrarily to our own rational nature ; I cannot conceive whence this should be. If therefore you think it needful for me to know it, I beseech you inform me herein a little.

Min. I do really think it very needful for you to understand this, seeing *Self-deceit* is a very dangerous disease, and unless it be timely cured, will certainly prove mortal. It is fit you should know every thing that may be of advantage to you to promote the cure : and it is very true, that to understand well the cause and original of a disease availeth very much to the right and perfect curing of it. You are not therefore too curious in de-

siring to understand this, and I shall readily afford you the best help that I can.

Par. I find indeed, that you are always ready so to do, and have much cause to thank you for it. Tell me then, I beseech you, whence this extreme madness in us cometh?

Min. I will endeavour to shew you *first* from what fountain this malignant humour springeth, that you may labour to get it stopped up as much as may be. And then, *secondly*, what it is that feeds this humour and increaseth it daily, that by cutting off the little rills that feed it, you may prevent its swelling too high to bear down all that stands in its way.

Par. Where may we find the spring-head whence this humour is derived?

Min. To find that, you must cast your eye back as far as the first beginning of mankind upon earth, there you will discover the original source of this disease.

Par. *Man* was first created by *God*, but I hope this disease of *Self-deceit* did not come from *God*.

Min. I have partly told you that already. No evil came from *God*. When *God* made *man*, he did not *deceive* him, neither make it necessary for him to *deceive himself*, nor put into his soul any inclination to it. He made him after his own *image*, and a part of the *image of God* in man is *knowledge* and *wisdom*.

Par. Yet I have heard some men say, that *God* seems to them the cause that *Adam* was deceived, because he made him such a creature as could be deceived.

Min. If you beget a son, that hath hands, and a power to use them; and yet abuseth them so, as to cut his own throat; will you therefore own yourself the cause why he cut his throat? I think you will not. But wicked men that love not any thing

thing but their lusts, cannot but find fault with God's doings. And the worst that they dare object against him, tho' they have a mind to nothing more than to quarrel with their Maker, is this, that he made man a *deceivable* creature, or such an one as might be deceived.

Par. And do they not say truly in that?

Min. Yes, they do. But what doth this that they say signify, more than this (except it be the impious boldness of them that say it) that he made *Adam* a *man*, and not a *god*? What will not they dare to do, who would teach their *Maker* how he should have made them?

Par. I desire to have this a little more explained.

Min. God made *Adam* a *man*, and gave him all the *faculties* of a *man*. A *freedom* of *choice*, or a *will* capable of chusing according to *reason*, is one of the *faculties* essential to a *man*; and a very noble faculty it is, being a power to use, and order, and behave himself in all things so, as both to honour *God* and enjoy him, to use the world to his comfort, and to be *lord* of it, to be for ever holy and for ever happy.

Par. But still he might abuse his power, and make a wrong choice.

Min. That is, he never was *God*, necessarily and indefectibly good. Was it not enough, that he might be good and happy if he would be so? And can he blame *God*, whilst he would not do so well for himself as *God* had given him power to do? He knew all that was fit for him to know, all that was needful to his duty and his happiness, and in this knowledge he might have continued if he would.

Par. And why did he not?

Min. He was deceived.

Par. But the *apostle* saith, that *Adam* was not deceived,

deceived, but the woman being deceived, was in the transgression, 1 Tim. ii. 14.

Min. These are the apostle's words, and they make nothing against that which I am to shew you. For whether it was the man or the woman, here was the original of *deceit* in mankind, and that is it I would now teach you. But by the way, it is not, I suppose, St. Paul's meaning in this place to deny that *Adam* was at all deceived, but his discourse tending to this purpose, to shew what reason there is that the woman should be in subjection to the man, and not the man to the woman, he brings in this for one, that the woman is the weaker vessel, and easilier seduced; as it appears by this, that the devil, who knew this too well, assaults not *Adam*, but her first with his temptation, hoping with more ease to do his work this way. It is therefore all one as if he had said thus, The serpent did not first tempt *Adam*; so that he being first deceived, did after deceive the woman, but he first deceived the woman, and then she was the occasion of *Adam's* transgression. She was deceived by the tempter; The serpent (saith she) beguiled me, and I did eat, Gen. iii. 13. And being herself first deceived, she deceived her husband, and he did also eat. Here is the spring-head then of *deceit*. God had made man a knowing creature, but not immutable or in defectible in his knowledge. God had not put into him any inclination to error or deceit, but he had not exempted him from all possibility of being deceived. He had done enough to secure him from error, but he did not all that he could have done to keep him from it. It is true, God suffered, or hindered not the serpent to deceive him; but he had made him such, as that he needed not to been deceived by him. The devil tempted him, but he had given him a power to resist the temptation. Therefore, not
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to dispute with too much vain curiosity, as some love to do, where the sin begun, whether in the *intellect* or *will*; nor to trouble our heads with abundance of foolish niceties wherein too many delight; this we plainly see, that our first parents *deceived themselves* by hearkening, when they needed not, to the deceiver. Not sufficiently considering as they should and might have done, the command and menace of *God*, the *God* of truth, they consented to the father of lyes, and since that, *every man is become a liar*, Rom. iii. 4. and more especially to himself, flattering himself with his own lyes. By yielding to the devil, *that deceiveth the world*, Rev. xii. 9. men are become their own *deceivers*, and *devils* to themselves. *Our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know them?* Jer. xvii. 9. If the fountain be muddy, who can expect that the streams should run clear? If the root be tainted and poisoned, the branches cannot be sound. The root of all mankind was *Adam*, and he was deceived; we being all branches springing from that one root, are all thereby made subject to deceit. The root of life and action in every man is the *heart*, and that being deceitful, what else can be expected, but that deceit should run quite through man, even as his blood doth in his veins. It is indeed become even natural to us so long as we are in this state of corrupt nature.

Thus you see, how man who was made by *God* in the *image* of *God* his Maker, and because of the great wisdom which *God* had given him, was thought fit to be set over the creatures here below, to be under *God* (the supreme *King* of the whole world) their *lord* and *governor*, with full power granted him by *God* to use them and *rule* them to his Maker's glory and his own comfort, by hearkening to the seducer, befooled himself,

and turned every thing that was made for his good into a temptation and a snare unto himself, lessened his own authority, and made every thing his master; became a soft, easy, and contemptible thing, apt to be imposed upon, outwitted and cheated by the devil and his instruments at every turn; and, what is worst of all, is become so stupid and sottish, as not to be sensible of the disgrace which he hath brought upon himself, but is rather apt to be proud of his own degradation, *to glory in his shame, and even to sport himself with his own deceivings*, Phil. iii. 19. 2 Pet. ii. 13. and *foaming out his own shame*, Jude 13. Men are apt to play with their own dishonour and ruin. *Fools make a mock of sin*, Prov. xiv. 9. And *it is a sport to them to do mischief*, Prov. x. 23. And that more especially to their own souls, cheating them out of glory and happiness. A *fool* and a *sinner* very often are words of the same signification in the *Scripture*; and among all the creatures that are upon earth, they are appropriated to *men* only, as if reason had been bestowed upon them to no other end, but to make themselves, by the abuse of it, more vile than all unreasonable things. These indeed are the right names of all men in their natural and unregenerate state; and a *fool*, you know, is very easily deceived, and most of all by his own *phant'sy*.

Par. But I can assure you, that many of them you call *fools*, think themselves no *fools*, but as *wise* and *wiser* than the best of you all.

Min. You may indeed very easily assure me of that. In what part of the world can a man now live, and not have experience of it? But tell me, I pray, when did you ever hear a fool call himself by that name? *Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom, but a man of understanding walketh uprightly*, Prov. xv. 21. yea, *the fool rageth, and*
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is confident, Prov. xiv. 16. But we will leave these men to that day, when they shall say, *We fools thought their life madness*, Wisd. v. 4.

Par. I did not well to interrupt you; go on, I beseech you, to shew whence it is that we are all so generally guilty of this folly.

Min. I have told you that our nature is corrupted, and in this depravation of our nature, there be two things which easily expose us to be deceived by others, and no less strongly incline us to deceive ourselves.

Par. What, I pray, are those two?

Min. Ignorance and Vanity, which are the right ingredients of a fool.

Par. They are so indeed. First, be pleased to say something of our ignorance.

Min. Adam was made a perfect man, and indued with knowledge at his creation; but we his offspring are born into the world ignorant of all things; we know not so much as what we are, or whither we are come, when we first enter into the world.

Par. So far very true; we are born without any knowledge at all of any thing, so far as can be discerned by our behaviour.

Min. Yet you must know something more, that, in respect of those things whereof we now discourse, matters *spiritual*, and of *eternal* concernment, we are not only born merely ignorant of them, without any knowledge or sense of them, any more than we have then of other things; but we are born with an *indisposedness* to them, and a strange kind of *averseness* from them, more than we have from other things.

Par. How doth that appear?

Min. Thus very plainly. Other things, such I mean as serve our flesh, we can learn very easily and readily as we grow up, by the help of such ordinary teachers as we have always about us,
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without any the least severity of discipline, and that because of our natural inclinations carrying us forth towards them. But spiritual things, such as concern the happiness of our souls, we very hardly learn, notwithstanding all the best helps which *God*, in great abundance, daily affordeth us. Nor do we ever learn them to any purpose, till our natural *stubbornness*, as well as *dulness*, be conquered by the almightiness of the divine *Spirit*. So sturdily doth the corruption that is in us struggle against, and resist all that is pure and heavenly.

Par. Yet we see that it is no hard matter to teach children *prayers* and short *catechisms*, such as are fittest for their age.

Min. If they learn them so easily, the more shame is it for those, who neglect to teach them the things which are so needful for them, and they can so easily learn. But what do you mean by their learning these things?

Par. They get them by heart, and can repeat them very readily.

Min. Thus far indeed you may teach some of them easily, and yet not so easily as you may teach them to play, or to swear, or to do unluckily; whereby you may see which way they are most inclined. But what talk you of their repeating these things by heart? This exercise of their memory is but a play or sport to them. Do you find it as easy, as they grow up, to make them understand what they can repeat, and to love the things they have learnt, and to practise accordingly? What you can find in children, I know not; but when we come to examine them, yea, when they are come to be men and women, and expert enough in their private callings or trades, we cannot find that they have learned what you say you can easily teach them. Either most children

dren are very dull, or unwilling to learn; or most parents are very negligent in this duty of teaching them.

Par. I cannot say much for their understandings and affections; we teach them the words, and so far we find they can learn.

Min. Hardly so much without a rod, or a bribe with something they love better. And though to teach them so much only, is far less than what you are bound by the laws of *God* and *nature* to teach them, yet I wish I could find, that any considerable number of you taught them thus far. Alas! we find it otherwise, when we come to try what they have learnt. However, till you can shew me that they learn good things with as much delight in them, and love to them, as they do evil, it stands good, that corrupt nature shews itself early averse from spiritual things.

Par. I have heard also, that many of the *beathens*, who had no other light to see by, but that of *nature* only, attained to great knowledge in divine matters.

Min. It must be granted, that under our natural teachers we may indeed make some very considerable proficiency in the knowledge of *God*, and learn much of that worship which is due unto him. *God* sheweth us very much of himself in all the works of *nature*, which lie daily open before our eyes; and especially in ourselves, who still retain so much of *God's image*, that, to see men live as they do, *that is*, as if they had no *God* to serve and honour, would make one think they had lost the very nature of men, and were but some strange kind of beasts in human shape, and were able to consider nothing that they see without them, or feel within them.

Par. How then say you, that we are all naturally not only *ignorant*, but even *averse* from the knowledge of *God*? *Min.*

Min. I speak of a practical knowledge especially, such as not only enlightens the understanding, but affects the heart with a true love of *God*, such as is necessary to salvation. Besides, though it be very considerable, yet is it but a little of that we ought to know of *God*, which we can attain unto by natural helps and teachers.

Par. Will you please to shew this a little more fully?

Min. We all know most assuredly, that we were not always what now we perceive ourselves to be; and we are very sensible, that, whatever now we are, we could not make ourselves to be what we are; and that now we are in being, we have not any such power and command, either over ourselves, or over other things, as to preserve either them, or ourselves, in being one moment. We know well enough, that we cannot make ourselves so happy as we would be, and that we cannot prolong our days on earth so long as we have a desire to live. We find, by troublesome experience, that we have desires that far exceed our powers; and natures, which are always needy and craving, and cannot be satisfied with any of those things which we can provide for them here below, and that we want power to give them the things that we see this world furnished withal in such a measure as they are desired. And thus far we all understand without much thinking or consideration.

Par. Alas! we daily feel our wants and weaknesses to our sorrow. But you say not yet, that we know any thing of *God*.

Min. Yes; we are able, by arguments drawn from nature, to convince ourselves of the *being* of a *First, Almighty, and Supreme Power*, the *Cause and Order* of us, and all things; and that as we, and all things, are from him, as from the original of
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all being, so we cannot subsist, have or enjoy any thing of all that we need or desire, but of his gift, and consequently that we cannot possible be happy any other way, than by continuing in his favour; nor can we enjoy his favour, but by pleasing him in obeying his will. That his will, whatever it is, must be the rule of our lives; and we can expect to fare no otherwise, than as we behave ourselves towards him. And farther yet, seeing he, that is the author of all being, must needs be the fountain of all goodness, we may be sure that he is perfectly good, and therefore that nothing but goodness can please him; and that nothing that is good can displease him, because the goodness of every thing can be nothing else but its agreeableness and conformity to his nature and will. And yet more, seeing he hath given us understanding and reason to consider the things that we see in the world, and to conclude certainly from what we see, that he, who made, and preserves and governs them, must needs have all wisdom, and power, and goodness, we can easily infer hence, that we, who are made to understand this, are bound to fear him, and honour him, and praise him, and shew ourselves thankful to him, for the numerous benefits we daily receive from him, and to live according to the rational nature which he hath given us; that this is our duty, and he must needs be pleased with them that do it, and displeased with them that do it not, and make them accordingly sensible of his pleasure or displeasure by rewards and punishments: and therefore, finding that he doth not always manifest this his pleasure or displeasure by the prosperity of good men, and the punishment of evil men, in this life, we very rationally conclude, that there must needs be another life after
this

this is ended, wherein he will reveal his righteousness in such rewards and punishments.

Par. By this it appears, that our natural ignorance is not so great as you seemed to make it.

Min. But hereby it will appear very true, that I said, that we are naturally very averse from the knowledge of *God*. Men may by nature, if they will use their natural faculties as they ought, attain to far greater measures of knowledge, than commonly they do : And seeing men do not, when so easily they may, 'tis very plain, that they are averse from it, and, as 'tis said *Rom. i.* Though *the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, may be clearly seen, being to be understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that men are without excuse, ver. 20. yet men like not to retain God in their knowledge, v. 28.* How few among you, though you daily see the wonderful works of *God*, and feast so plentifully on his gifts, are wont to consider these things as you ought ? Do not you rather go on like brute beasts, filling yourselves with the good things that *God* giveth, without once considering whence they come, or what obligations they lay upon you ?

Par. I wish I could say it were not so.

Min. But suppose, that all this which I now said may be naturally known, were known by you all ; yea, suppose it were a great deal more than this, as I deny not, but by the serious study of nature, more of *God* may be known ; yet still would you be at a very great loss for something altogether necessary to your happiness, which the school of nature can never teach you.

Par. As how, I pray you ?

Min. You know, it may be, there is a *God*, and doubt no more of it, than you can doubt,
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whether you see any creatures. But can you also, by the works of nature, learn who the true God is? Did not even they, who among the *beathens* attained to all that knowledge of God we but now spake of, yet worship idols? Did they not *change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things*, Rom. i. 23. You know, that in the enjoyment of God, and in his love and favour, your only *happinefs* consisteth; you know this, it may be, as assuredly, as you know that you have a desire to be happy. But do you also know by what means you may attain to this blessed enjoyment of him, without other instructions from him than the creatures are able to give you? His will, you know, must be our rule and law to live by; but can you know what the particulars of his will and pleasure are, without his supernatural revelation of the same?

Par. What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the spirit of God, 1 Cor. ii. 11.

Min. I will tell you this more, which, it may be, you too little consider, That the highest degrees of natural knowledge, which any man can attain unto, will serve him to no other purpose, but to confound and perplex him, until he be taught it in a more perfect manner than it can be learned in the book of nature only. Such an imperfect knowledge will but help us the more easily to *deceive ourselves*.

Par. I cannot well understand that.

Min. I will help you as well as I can. By this natural knowledge we are either brought to a true discerning of our own imperfections and wants, or we are not. Choose which you will.

Par.

Par. I cannot well tell which is truest ; but supposing either of them, what will follow ?

Min. Suppose *first*, that we are not thereby brought to the sense of the imperfection and scantiness of our own goodness ; and to know, that every thing we do, hath a great mixture of evil with it ; do not you of yourself see what follows ?

Par. I only see this, that we are so far ignorant of our selves.

Min. Do not you know, that *God* being perfectly good, nothing but a perfect goodness can be pleasing to him ? And look how much evil there is in us, so much there is in us that is odious and abominable to *God* ? If you know this, which nature teacheth you, then you know, that if we be not yet brought to know the imperfection of our own goodness, we do not know that whatever is in us, or proceeds from us, is displeasing to *God*, because of the mixture of much evil with it ; and hereupon we are ready to conclude falsely, that because we see it not, there is not such a thing ; but that we are perfectly good ; and so we *deceive ourselves* with vain thoughts and a false confidence of our being acceptable to *God*, and beloved of him, whilst we are odious to him, and under his displeasure ; and not seeing the evil that is in us, all we get by our knowledge is no more, but to ruin ourselves by a presumption that we are out of all danger of ruin.

Par. Now I see this plainly follows, upon our ignorance of our own corruption and imperfection. But suppose we be brought to the knowledge hereof by nature, then surely no such evil can follow.

Min. If we be brought to this knowledge of ourselves, then it follows that we know there is much in us that is odious to *God*, and deserveth his indignation ; and that so long as this remains
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in us, we are very miserable, and must be so, till God be reconciled unto us. And yet what course is to be taken to reconcile him to us, we are not able to discover; and so all we get by our knowledge is only this, that we perceive ourselves to be miserable, and at a loss for happiness, and know not how to help ourselves.

Par. I find now the truth of your assertion, that natural knowledge alone can only serve to perplex us, and increase our misery.

Min. That we may conclude this point, there needeth no plainer evidence of our natural ignorance, and our aptness through it to deceive ourselves, than what we read in the writings, and may observe in the practice of the wisest of nature's scholars, the soberest of the *heathen philosophers*. It cannot be denied, but that these men had learned in the school of nature, to say many true and excellent things, both of God and of man, and have given some very good rules, both of *piety*, and of *justice* and *sobriety*: but when they come to describe the particular *acts* of religion, whereby God is to be worshipped, they soon discover their great ignorance of the true God, by the very absurd means which they prescribed and used either to honour or appease him, and in the abominable idols which they set up, either as *receptacles* or *representatives* of the Deity. They made it hereby very apparent, that they worshipped they knew not what, an *unknown God*, Acts xvii. 23. and would be religious, but they knew not how, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened, Rom. i. 21. And as their piety was no better than a blind superstition, so the very height of their morality was a foolish pride; and all their confidence was placed in that, which true religion commandeth men, in the first place, to deny, to wit, in themselves, and a righteousness

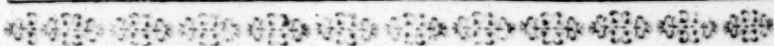
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of their *own*, the weakness and defectiveness whereof they were not able, with all their natural wisdom, to discern. Thus *the world through wisdom knew not God*, 1 Cor. i. 21. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned*, 1 Cor. ii. 14. Now he that is so ignorant, that he cannot know the true God from an idol, nor true wisdom from folly, nor true religion from *superstitious dotage*, must needs deceive himself, both in the choice of his God, and the way of worshipping him.

Par. You have sufficiently discovered to me our natural ignorance, whereby we cannot choose but be very subject to mistakes. And I must be content with thus much at present, my necessary occasions calling me away.

Min. When you have a fit opportunity of hearing what I have yet to tell you upon this point, I hope you will embrace it.



S E C T. VI.

*Whence this evil inclination proceeds,
farther shewn.*

Par.



I R, I have made what haste I could to wait upon you again, longing to hear what you have more to say of the subject of our last discourse.

Min. I am very well pleased to see you so desirous of instruction.

Par.

Par. You shewed me the last time our natural ignorance; be pleased now to shew wherein our vanity, that you mentioned, shews itself.

Min. That indeed comes next to be spoken of. Men are naturally not only *ignorant*, but *vain*; yet *vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt*, Job xi. 12. It were very easy for me, were it as needful for you, to discover to you this vanity of man, in this corrupt state of nature, even almost in every thing that belongeth to him, or cometh from him. But it will, I suppose, be enough for our present purpose, if, after the ignorance of his mind, I say but a little of the vanity of his *affections*, and especially of his *love* and *delight*. And this will give a sufficient insight into the grounds of our proneness to *Self-deceit*.

Par. That indeed is the thing that I desire at present to be taught.

Min. If you have a child that is capable of learning, but hath so great a love to play and foolish toys, that he hath no love to his book, which, do you think, is easier to cure him of, his ignorance, or his immoderate love to play and folly?

Par. There is little question to be made of it, that his ignorance is much easier to cure than his vain affection: such an one is easier brought to understand his book, than to love it.

Min. And besides that, an error through ignorance only is neither so dangerous nor so incurable, where there is a real desire of knowledge, and a love of truth. But where a child is not only ignorant, but averse from instruction, and delighted only in sports and childish toys, it is so much harder to change his affections, than to inform his understanding, that it is only the difficulty of the former that can make the latter, in any measure, hard to do; and it alone can make it hard, even nigh to an impossibility. When a

man is once unhappily fallen in love with his error, even the strongest arguments have little virtue in them to work his conviction.

Par. This is a truth, which common experience teacheth us. But what will you make of this to the purpose now in hand?

Min. You know, that we are all of us children before we be men and women; and you may know, that many of us, for the love we bear to childish things, do never come to be men indeed: yea, how few can say with the *Apostle*, 1 Cor. xiii. 11. *When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.* Our childhood gives us an earlier taste of foolish pleasure and vanity, than of truth and goodness; and the natural inclination to sin and vanity, which we bring into the world, is, by inconsiderate parents, as tenderly cherished and fed, as our bodies are. And vain pleasures, the sweet milk wherewith our corruption is nursed up, have so grateful a relish to flesh and blood, and sit so close upon sense, phant'asy, and appetite, that we are prejudiced very early thereby against more solid food, and serious things will not down with us, but every thing that is vain is good. Since forbidden fruit, *good for food, and pleasant to the eyes*, was first tasted, almost nothing, that is not forbidden, seems to have any, either pleasant relish, or beauty, for which we can think it desirable, but rather is altogether to us unfavoury. Of what parts do you think that man consists?

Par. All men are made up of two parts, a *body*, and a *soul*.

Min. Which of these two is it that most truly makes us men, and to be of a different kind from brute beasts?

Par.

Par. It is man's soul, wherein he differeth most from beasts; for we see, that in our bodies we have most things common to us with beasts.

Min. You say very right: We do not much differ from beasts in flesh and blood, or any thing that belongeth to the body: We are fed and nourished, yea, and propagated even as they are. And to these ends we have the same kind of sense and natural appetite which they have, that we may desire, and seek, and take pleasure in our meat and drink, and all other things which are needful to our bodies, and wherewith this world, by *God's* good providence, is abundantly furnished for our use, in order to the preservation of our bodily life, health and strength, so long on this earth, as it shall seem good to *God* to continue us thereupon, and for the propagating and upholding the race of mankind to the end of the world.

Par. May we not then delight and take pleasure in these good things of the world, which *God* hath provided for us?

Min. Yes certainly, it is natural to us so to do; we may and ought to desire, and use, and take pleasure in them, as tokens of *God's* goodness to us, to the abovementioned ends, that we may live in health, and strength, and comfortably serve *God* in this life, and *God* may have a generation of men, to glorify him on earth, to the world's end. In all this there can be no evil, it is to act according to the nature which *God* hath given us: but man should still remember, that he is a *man*, and not a *beast*.

Par. And that, methinks, no man can possibly forget.

Min. Whether we can forget it or no, we are apt too little to consider it. That which I mean by it is this, that we should consider that *God* hath honoured us with a higher and more noble na-

nature; a *spiritual, reasonable, and immortal soul* hath he placed within us, indued with such *faculties or powers*, as fit and enable us to discern, choose, and pursue after things of a *spiritual, heavenly, and durable* nature, and which are as fitly suited to our *souls*, as those other things before-mentioned are to our *bodies*. *God* hath made the soul of man of such a nature, that it can receive no fulness or satisfaction from any earthly thing whatsoever; it cannot be satisfied with any thing that is of no greater excellency and virtue, or of no longer duration and continuance, than the things of this world are. And hereby we may easily perceive, if we will, that although we need, and are to desire and use the things of this world, we were made principally for another kind of life, than merely sensitive creatures were made for; except we can be so foolish as to think, that the infinitely wise *God* hath made something in vain, or that he hath made the more noble and perfect creatures for no nobler ends, than the less perfect and honourable. In order to that life for which *God* principally made us, we must needs think that we have other things to learn, to consider, and to think upon, to desire, seek and labour for, than those inferior creatures have; and these are things that concern something else than the body, and are prepared for better uses, than to serve and gratify flesh and blood, even things spiritual and eternal, angels food, such as our immortal souls may feast upon to full satisfaction, such blessings as can make us happy indeed, and that for ever, in the presence and fruition of the *Father of Spirits*.

Par. We have indeed an eternal life to provide for, as well as a temporal; and spiritual things are as needful for us as carnal. And not to consider this, is a great vanity, unto which we are

too subject. And I think one reason why we are so, is, because we know that part of ourselves which is invisible, too little, and not understanding its nature, we consider not its needs, nor what God hath provided for it, nor how to value it, or the things that are proper to it, as we ought to do.

Min. It is as you say. We should therefore remember, that God hath bestowed upon us a *judging, discerning and distinguishing* power; so that, by the right exercise of our reason, we are able to compare things one with another, and to find out their agreement and their difference, what is better and what is worse; and what is the true and real *value* of things, by considering their *nature*, their *use*, and the *ends* for which they serve; how well they are fitted for those ends and uses, and how far, on that account, they are to be loved and chosen. Besides this discerning and judging faculty, whereby we are fitted to make a right estimate of every thing, we have also a power of *determining* and making our *choice* of things according to their worth, to *will, desire and seek*, or *turn away from, loath and shun*, as we see cause; and to command ourselves so to do, as there is occasion for it: By *this* we can set our *reason* on work to consider better, and weigh all things more impartially; and after that, by a determinate *resolution*, we can charge our hearts to acquiesce and rest satisfied with the determination of reason, and to obey its directions. *Lastly*, we have naturally in us certain *affections* of mind, such as *love and hatred, fear and hope, desire and loathing, delight and grief*, with others of like nature. Now these are, as it were, the common-people in the little kingdom of man, continually at work, and, whilst under good government, the very strength of it; but if ungoverned, and let loose, and permitted

to themselves, by confusion and tumult they bring all to ruin. These are they that are first awakened, and take the alarm from the senses, and are mightily moved and disturbed by the things which our senses apprehend, and put the whole man into no little disorder. And to this good end they should serve us, to rouse us up to a serious consideration of all matters of moment, of all dangers and difficulties, of all advantages and disadvantages, gains or losses; in a word, of all the concerns of *body* and *soul*. Naturally they are to give no rest to the soul, till reason be set on work to direct, and the *will* have resolved upon some right course. Now if, in such case, the *reason* do its office, and the *will* resolve and command according to its good directions and counsel, then all will soon be well, and these same affections, well governed, and kept in due order, will prove the very life and strength of execution: But if these *affections*, incensed by sense or imagination, be left at large and masterless, the *will* is presently hurried away with them, and *reason* is surprized, and hath no space granted to deliberate, or is blinded with the dust that is raised in the bustle; there can be no counsel, and then there can be no order; all is vanity at present, and will be vexation in the end. Do you not feel this true by experience in yourself?

Par. I feel it indeed, and that almost daily. One affection or other carries me blindly on to such things, as when my reason is awake to consider them aright, I would give a considerable thing that they had never been done.

Min. Hence therefore, when you seriously call to mind how the case stands with us all in the state of unregenerate nature and corruption, you may easily see what our *vanity* is, which is the fomentor of *Self-deceit*. It is evident enough to all of us,
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that have been taught to know ourselves, as we may behold ourselves in the true and never-flattering glass of *God's word*, that the loss of that *dominion* which *God* had given man at his creation, as a very considerable part of his own *image*, is more especially visible and most lamentable, in this *subjection* and thralldom of our *reason*, or our judging, deliberating and directing faculty, to our *sensitive* appetite, and brutish affections, which should be directed and governed by it; and that our *will* and choice is now usually more *swayed* and *let* by these blind *affections*, than by our *reason*. We are, as hath been said, and every man knoweth, born ignorant; and not as *Adam* was, when created, indued with any knowledge of all things, or so much as of any one thing that concerneth us; or with a faculty naturally disposed to judge aright of every thing, as hereafter it shall be offered to our consideration. As, first we live the life of a plant in the womb, are quickened, and nourished, and grow: so when we are born into the world, for some time we live (as far as can be discerned) no otherwise, than other animals do, a life of mere sense. We are naturally desirous of our food and nourishment; and we express some sense of pain and pleasure in the flesh; we see, and hear, and taste, and smell, and feel; but we come not, till after some considerable time, and by slow degrees, to exercise any thing of reason and judgment, or to give forth any tokens or proofs of human and rational nature; and are hardly by any thing distinguishable from brute creatures, but only by the shape of our bodies. For some while, we exercise only our senses and sensitive appetite, and our affections are moved only by sensible objects; sensible things are all that we can either love, or hate, fear or desire, be troubled at, or delight in; and that, because we know no other:
nor

nor are our affections or actions governed by any thing of reason in us, nor have our will any rational guide that they follow; but we are wholly under the conduct of others, and further than their reason governs us, we are guided by no reason at all. It is not till after some years, and much instruction, that our own reason can act to any purpose in us.

Par. Experience teacheth us all this.

Min. Yet are there some things more which deserve our consideration in this place.

Par. What are they? I beseech you let me know.

Min. More than I can now name, all which help to increase our vanity, and to prejudice us against all that is serious or good.

Par. Will you let me hear some of them?

Min. *First*, Observe, that *sense* hath got the start of *reason* in us, and hath gone some years before it; and by this means, sensible things, having for so long a time been the only things that we have been acquainted with, and we having been capable all this while of knowing no other pleasure or grief but that of the flesh, which ariseth from these objects of sense, have got possession of us, and have strongly engaged our affections to themselves, and hold them so fully busied and imployed, that we are hardly at leisure for them to attend to any thing else; but our thoughts are continually (whatever else they are called unto) flying back unto them.

Par. This is one great hindrance to seriousness and goodness; what is the next?

Min. *Secondly*, consider, that our *reason*, which should direct us to better things, and should govern our affections and actions by a rule, must, before it can do its office, be well awakened, and duly informed by good instruction: and here
again

again some things very obvious mightily obstruct its right information : as,

1. It is but too rare a thing to meet with good instructors in our youth, such as will take that pains with us, as to ply us with instruction as much as we need it.

2. And then, if we be so happy as to have such instructors; yet the instruction that must set us right, tendeth so much to restrain us in the pursuit of those things, wherewith we are already deeply in love, that it must needs seem to us, at that age, to be altogether against us; and therefore we are very hardly persuaded to love it, or them that give it: and whatever instruction we hearken to of this kind, it is only for *fear* that we do so, and this makes us the more weary of it, and still more and more to hate it.

3. That which our instructors are to commend unto us, is something invisible; and such as is as little obvious to sense, as it can gratify the flesh; which is the only part of ourselves, which we have yet learned to love, or are in any measure acquainted with, or can have any desire to please. And we cannot but be very sensible what strong prejudices there must needs be in us against the ready hearkening and yielding to wholesome instructions, both from our natural undisposedness to such things, and from a long rooted affection, already growing in us, to the things from which they would restrain us; and also from the remoteness and invisibleness, and novelty too, as to us, of the things we are to be taught.

4. Consider how much this prejudice against good instruction must needs be strengthened by the great multitude of evil examples, which stand thick round about us, and we have some of them always before our eyes. And these bad examples are not of some one sort of men, but even of
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men of all ranks, great and small : and again of men that pretend as highly to wit and reason, as the very wisest of our instructors can be supposed to do : and these again in number far exceeding not only our instructors, but even all that we can either see or hear of living so, as in life to exemplify those good lessons which are commended to our learning. In most men that would take upon them to be our instructors, we can discern nothing to persuade us, that they themselves do really believe what they would teach us to believe ; but on the contrary a constant course of customary practising those very things from which they endeavour to dissuade us ; pleasing their flesh and carnal appetites in all things as far as they can. Now to see so many, and those so great, and reputedly wise, on all hands to side with us in our loves and delights ; and to see many of our instructors, if not most, live so unanswerably to their own instructions, and seemingly not to believe themselves ; and again, to see those that are best, and would live as they teach, to be so very few, and so imperfectly at best, to exemplify their own doctrine, this must needs be a great rub in our way.

5. *Lastly*, to trouble you but with one thing more : When we consider what kind of parents most children have, whom even naturally, as well as for the dependance they have upon them, they are apt to love and esteem, and so to imitate rather than others ; presuming that they will teach them nothing, by word or example, that is hurtful for them ; we see still more, under what prejudices such children lie. Suppose that wicked parents will give their children good admonitions ; yet of how little force must we think such admonitions will be with their children ? They see their parents lead lives quite contrary to the lives which

which they would persuade them to lead ; and how can they believe they are in earnest with them ? How can such parents expect obedience from their children, when they lay this hard choice upon them, either not to obey them, or by obeying them, in effect, to call them fools ? For so the child that obeyeth them must needs think them to be ; *that is*, either fools *first*, in not using themselves the good advice which they give them ; or *secondly*, fools, in hoping to persuade their children to hearken to the counsel which they themselves despise ; and to love the ways which themselves hate. When all these things, and many more, which I am loth to tire you now with repeating, are well considered, it will not seem strange any longer to you, that *reason* should be so weak, and *affection* so strong, even to unreasonable things, in rational men.

Par. My wonder is much abated by what you have said, and I plainly perceive how it comes to pass, that our wills are rather apt to be led blindly by the sensitive appetite, than to be guided by the sober dictates of right reason ; and that it commandeth our executive powers to serve the former rather than the latter, and that men generally choose to live rather after the flesh, than after the spirit.

Min. If you perceive this, then you perceive the *vanity* of men whereof I told you. For, seeing these bodies of ours, how much soever they have gained upon our affections, are no more than the habitations or instruments of our souls ; and seeing that this short life which we are to live on earth, is no more but the way to an endless eternity in heaven or hell : what a very childish piece of vanity and folly must it needs be in us, to be always very eagerly busied in the pursuit of those things which are for the body only ? To love
+ earthly

earthly things more than things heavenly, to please the flesh in all things, and to disregard the spirit, to consult for the present only, and neglect the future? Yet thus childishly vain are we all by nature, *simple ones, that love simplicity*, Prov. i. 22. And we will follow what we love, rather than consider what best deserves our love; we will delight and please ourselves in vain and worthless toys, rather than consider how we may find that which may afford us a solid and lasting delight; we will be over-ruled by our childish affections and brutish appetites, though we know we shall thereby incur our heavenly *Father's* displeasure, and forfeit that eternal and glorious inheritance which he hath provided for us. We are wholly bent upon pleasing ourselves, and we will not consider, that we have any other selves to please, but corruptible bodies, and the filthy lusts of the flesh. How easy hence is it to conceive, how apt such as we are, must be to *deceive ourselves*, seeing we are naturally both so ignorant and so vain? Every man may easily see it, that knoweth what it is to be a fool; and we all know this too well, if we have learned to know ourselves.


Par. You have now taught me, that our natures are corrupt by the sin of our first parents; and that hence we are obnoxious to *Self-deceit*; and that our understandings being clouded with ignorance, and our affections tainted with vanity, we must needs be thereby very forward to *deceive ourselves*. I will desire no more of you at this time, but rather consider and meditate on what I have now heard, till another convenient opportunity of waiting upon you.

Min. And in the mean time, I shall pray for a blessing upon your meditations, that you may come thereby to the knowledge of *God* and *yourself*.

SECT.

S E C T. VII.

The ways and methods of SELF-DECEIT.

Par. AVING well considered what you last told me, and finding nothing to object against any part of it, I now desire you to go on to what you think fittest next to speak of.

Min. Having told you, and I hope convinced you, how ready we all are to deceive ourselves, I think it will now be very seasonable to warn you to beware of those things whereby we are apt to run into *Self-deceit*, or the ways, courses or methods we use of deceiving ourselves.

Par. Be pleased then to point out those to me in order.

Min. They are more than I can, it is likely, call to remembrance ; but some of the chief of them I shall mind you of, and that which is most obvious to our notice, and which indeed may well be called the mother of all the rest, is, *inconsideration*.

Par. What is that you call by that name ?

Min. By *inconsideration* I mean, a not thinking or meditating seriously and sufficiently of such things as are of great concernment to us and to our happiness, but going on at a venture in the ways that we love, without thinking whither they will carry us, or what cause we have to be more cautious.

Min.

Par. It is certain enough, that such inconsiderateness in our doings must occasion many errors.

Min. And it is as certain, that this is a very common fault among us, as that abundance of evils arise daily from it. We are generally very averse from it.

Par. And whence do you think this averseness should proceed?

Min. *Partly* from our laziness; we are too idle, and too much in love with our ease to undertake this task in earnest, seeing it requireth much labour and intentness of mind; and *partly* from our being too long accustomed to go on in a beaten track, and to do only as others bid us do, or as we see others for the most part do, though we know not well why, but only it is easy and customary. We have not been used to think for ourselves, and we know not which way to get into any method of thinking, but let our thoughts run at random which way they will.

Par. Will you shew me how this leadeth us into *Self-deceit*?

Min. You cannot but know, how that in all matters of any great moment which men undertake, if they do not well consider beforehand, both how much it concerns them to do them well, and what things are needful to bring them to effect, and also what hindrances there are to be put out of the way, they take a ready course to deceive themselves, and frustrate their own designs. As if a man consider not what cost or charges the thing may put him to, and also his own ability, whether he be able to expend or lay out so much upon it: or if he think not of the dangers and great difficulties which he may probably meet with, at least for ought he knoweth to the contrary; and again whether he be able either to escape or conquer them: if he think not of the
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ends and usefulness, the reasonableness or unreasonableness, the necessity or vanity of his undertaking, and what reasons he may, in all likelihood, find either to go through with it, or give it over. If such things as these be not well and seriously thought upon in time, a man may go on a long time possibly in his work with great pains and cost, animated with great hope of success, and all this while labour hard in vain, and pay dear for nothing : and this, it may be, he shall not discover till his purse and strength be exhausted ; and it will be too late to repent, or to enter upon new consultations. It is thus, I am sure, with too many in the great concerns of the soul, the matters of religion ; and it is the very reason which our blessed *Saviour* giveth, in his parabolical way of discoursing, why men so frequently deceive themselves in the matter of Christianity, that they enter upon the profession thereof unadvisedly, and engage themselves in this holy religion, as in a thing they are not well acquainted with, as tho' it were some slight and easy business, which needed little consideration ; and so they go on as they began in it, to no better purpose than to befool themselves in the end.

Par. Shew me, I pray, where those words of *Christ* are to be found.

Min. You may read them *Luke xiv. ver. 28, &c.* Which of you (saith he) intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold him begin to mock him : saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? or else while the other is yet a great way

way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Par. These words indeed are very clear, and full to the purpose.

Min. But how little is the thing, that Christ would herein commend unto us, made the practice of Christians? alas! the greatest part of us live as if we thought, that to be Christians were no more but to be born of Christian parents, or rather of parents which pass under the name of Christians where they live, though no reason at all can be given why they should be so called; or as if to be baptized, though we never care to know what baptism signifieth, or to go to church among those that are called Christians, and to behave ourselves there a while outwardly as they do, were enough to make as good Christians. How little care or pains is there taken thoroughly to understand the *articles of the christian faith*, or to know what influence they ought to have upon our hearts and lives? What time are we wont to bestow in learning all the branches of our christian duty, and how to practise them all the days of our life? What serious thoughts have the generality of us, about the strong workings of corruption in us, or the strength thereby given to the numerous temptations which we must needs meet with in the way to heaven; or the dangers and most terrible things which those temptations prevailing with us bring us into, or what helps are necessary to enable us to conquer these temptations, and to go on safely in the way to life? tell me, is it your business much to consider these things?

Par. You have often put us in mind of these things in your sermons, and how then should we not consider them; do you think we mind not what we hear?

Min. I have great cause to fear that very many of you mind them not at all, nor so much as consider when you hear of such things, whether you understand what you hear, but satisfy yourselves with the bare hearing of them. And yet though you mind and understand them just then when you hear them, you cannot be so foolish surely, as to think this enough.

Par. What should we do more ?

Min. To what end are you put in remembrance of them ?

Par. That we may not forget them.

Min. To what end are you to remember them ?

Par. That we may do them.

Min. And do you so indeed, and yet consider of them no longer than whilst you hear them ?

Par. We have too many other necessary businesses to think upon at other times.

Min. You have many things indeed to think upon, which you ought not to neglect ; but you should be so wise as to think upon every thing in its due season, and in due measure according to its worth, and your need of it, and then that must be most thought on which is most needful, and will do you most good ; and is not this your religion, and the way to heaven, and eternal happiness in heaven ? Are not these things more considerable than all earthly things, and therefore more to be considered ? Your unwillingness to go aside at fit times, and to sequester yourselves at those seasons from all other business, that you may employ all your thoughts about the nature and weight of this great undertaking, the sincere practice of Christianity, this, I say, is it that, above all things, disposeth you to cheat yourselves. And, as I said but now, you are unwilling thus to employ yourselves, because it is uneasy to you. Either you have wanted good education, and for

want of such instructions, as being frequently inculcated and pressed upon you, should have worn and cut, as it were, a channel for your thoughts to run in, and have habituated your minds to these things, you are at an utter loss, whenever you at any time essay to bring yourselves to it; and finding it hard, you presently fly off from it in despair, and venture no more upon it: or else you have been accustomed to feed so much upon carnal pleasures and earthly things, that you are not able to bear that which would so much check your carnal and worldly delights, and take you off so much from tasting the sweetness and pleasure of them as serious consideration of spiritual things will do. It is a very ungrateful thing to most of you to have your present sensual joys interrupted, and the tickling gust or relish of your pleasures any whit abated by serious thinking and musing, and therefore you are very desirous to persuade yourselves that such thoughts are altogether needless, yea, dangerous and foolish; and all this only because you find them troublesome and uneasy to you. Say in earnest, is not this true?

Par. Though I did not perceive it in myself before, yet now that you lay it so plainly before me, I cannot deny it. We are just like idle boys at school, our minds are always running either upon our breakfast and dinner, or our childish sports and fooleries, and we are willing to hope we shall be scholars good enough in time, without interrupting our play and pastime with so much poring and thinking on our books, or considering the end of our going to school, or the nature and requisites of that profession for which we are by our parents designed: and if the teacher's rod do not more befriend us than our own care and study, we are like to hold on thus
deceiving

deceiving ourselves by our own inconsiderateness, even till we become thereby fit for nothing, and have no way whereby we can tell how to live usefully in the world. I am now by your help very sensible of this, and I therefore desire your farther assistance, in shewing what the things are which I should most consider to prevent *Self-deceit*.

Min. In the great business of *religion* there is abundant matter which calleth for the deepest and most serious consideration, enough to keep a man's thoughts awake, and in continual employment; and which if we will not be at the pains to consider as we ought, it is impossible but we must miscarry through our own laziness and folly. To shew you this in all particulars, and how we are used, for want of a due pondering of all things as they deserve, to deceive ourselves almost in every thing, would be a very long and tedious work, though it will, I hope, in some good measure, be done hereafter, if you grow not weary of my company. Now amongst many other things very considerable, I shall only name *four* to you, the not well considering whereof doth chiefly expose us to *Self-deceit*.

Par. What *four* things are those? I beseech you, tell me.

Min. They are these: 1. *The nature and attributes of God, and his relation to us.* 2. *The main design and end of the Christian religion.* 3. *The nature and use of earthly things.* And, 4. *Our latter end, and what either eternal misery, or eternal happiness do really signify.*

Par. These are weighty things indeed, and I fear I neither understand them well, nor have considered them aright so far as I understand them; but do very much need your help herein.

Min. To begin then with the *first* of them: *Our not thoroughly considering the nature and attributes*

of God, and the mutual relations that are betwixt God and us, is a never-failing way of deceiving ourselves. It is certain, that no worship or duty can be acceptable and well-pleasing to God, which hath not in it some kind of suitableness to the nature of God, and therefore we cannot worship and serve God as we ought, except we competently understand his nature. Again, all those duties which naturally we owe unto God, do arise and spring from the relations wherein God stands to us, and we to him : and therefore it is plain, that he who doth not well understand what God is to him, and how he is related to God, must needs be exceeding prone to error and mistake in his whole behaviour towards God. We are, I know not how, apt to fancy *God to be but such an one as ourselves*, Psal. l. 21. Or we take him to be like some great lord or prince at most, sitting in great *majesty* in his royal *palace* somewhere above us in the higher part of the world, and ruling things below, hardly any otherwise than worldly *monarchs* use to do, by certain officers that he hath placed under him in this lower world, whom if we can make a shift any how to please, either by hearty obedience or hypocrisy, all is well enough. Men are too forward, for want of a true understanding of God's nature, to hope that he taketh not much notice himself of their behaviour, and that they may deceive him, and put him off, and make him be contented with a half-religion, or with a painted image or shadow of devotion and piety, which hath nothing at all of the truth and life of religion and godliness in it.

Par. This were indeed a foul mistake, which I hope but few of us can be guilty of. Will you please to shew it a little more particularly ?

Min. That I hope to do hereafter to your satisfaction. Yet something I shall now say to make
you

you understand this point in some good measure. God is by nature an *infinite spirit*, every where invisibly present with, in, and thro' all things; first giving, and always upholding the being of every thing. Now he that doth not well consider this, and so as to remember that his very being and life doth totally depend on God, and that he is always in the presence and before the face of God; and that not so much a single thought of his heart can be hid from him, will not know how to offer unto God a hearty and a spiritual worship, nor look so well as it is needful he should do, to the sincerity and uprightness of his heart and intentions.

He that thinketh not much of God's infinite purity, and considereth not how contrary to the holiness of God's nature all unholiness is; and how therefore every thing defiled with sin is abominable in his eyes: will not be so careful and industriously bent upon the purifying of his own heart, and cleansing himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, as it concerns him to be.

He that considereth not God to be his *Maker*, and by that right of creation his absolute Lord and Owner, having so full a right in him, and so unlimited a power over him, that he may neither call himself nor any thing that he hath his own, any otherwise, or to any other purposes, than as he holdeth that right of God, and hath from him a title to it, and leave to use it for such uses only as God hath appointed; this man will never think of resigning himself and all that he hath intirely and unreservedly unto God, but will be apt to think himself and what he possesseth, to be, at least in some part and measure, his own, and at his own free and arbitrary disposal, without being accountable to any one for it; neither will he

make it the sole business of his life to glorify God in his soul and body, in consideration that they are both his.

He that thinketh not upon God as the *supreme, absolute and only Monarch universal*, and Governor of the whole world, actually ruling and ordering all things therein, even as it pleaseth him; whose will and pleasure is the law which all things are to obey, and whose honour and glory the end of their being; will be ready to think himself in some part his own master, and challenge to himself a right to do as he listeth, and seek the fulfilling of his own will and pleasure, and not give himself wholly to God in an universal subjection and obedience to his will, whether in doing or suffering. He will not make it his chief study and resolution to keep God's commandments, and fully to satisfy himself with the whole course of God's providence; not regarding his own desires any otherwise than how they may be conformable unto God's will, and how he may be so *transformed by the renewing of his mind, that he may be able to approve what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God*, Rom. xii. 2.

Lastly, he that hath not well considered that God is the chief and only original good, *that there is none good but one, that is God*, Matt. xix. 17. and no goodness at all, but what is in and from him; and that he is the sole universal benefactor, who doth all the good that is done in the world: that he is indeed good to all, and that every good thing is derived to us from his goodness only, will never be able to make God only his portion, nor to take up his rest in him as his only happiness, nor to love him for himself only with all his heart and soul, and strength, but he will be seeking good in the creatures, without any respect to God, or thankful reflection upon the divine goodness,

ness, for whatever benefit or comfort he finds in them: he will have a self, and other things for himself only to love, and seek, and serve, and delight himself in, more than in God; and in all this he will be apt to think that he doth well enough, and that he giveth unto God all the honour due unto his name.

Par. All this I hope I understand; and I have the charity to think there are but few Christians that do not consider it, though, it may be, not so thoroughly, nor so often, as were fit.

Min. Whatever your charity may prompt you to believe, there can be nothing plainer to men, who use to consider what they see, than that the far greatest part of those, who are by name Christians, do live as if they were without God in the world, even whilst they pretend to be worshippers of God, and to hope for eternal life from God. They eat, and drink, and sleep, and play, and follow their daily works, and carry on their worldly designs, as things which are natural and necessary, or useful at least to themselves, and their posterity after them; but as for God, he seems to be very seldom in their thoughts: how the goodness and usefulness of these things wherein they are employed depends upon his blessing, and how in all these things his goodness should be tasted, and how they should all be improved as helps and means of serving and honouring God; these, I say, are thoughts that they are very little accustomed to. How few consider themselves, wheresoever they are, alone or in company, to be always with God, and in his presence, and behave themselves suitably to such a presence with holy reverence and godly fear? What number of you keep this in remembrance, that, in all the works and businesses you take in hand, you should be working for God, and studying how to please him,

him, who is always looking on and observing what you do? How you should expect no profit of all your labour, but what must come from God, nor trust to any skill or ability of your own, without the concurrence of his help and blessing; neither desire any other honour or praise to yourselves, but that which is of God only? And yet these are lessons, which even heathen nature would teach us, if we would attend unto it. Our own reason, unassisted by any supernatural revelation, from the law written in our natures, would convince us that we are nothing, and can do nothing of ourselves, without God. What else then can it be, but the gross neglect of this considering what God is, and how we stand related unto God, that is the original of that loose kind of life which most of you lead, and of that strange unreasonable confidence which you have, that notwithstanding you thus live as if you were beholden to none but yourselves, or to others like yourselves, for any thing, yet you both do well, and shall do well for ever?

Par. You have convinced me, by what you have now said, both that not considering God, and our relation to him, is a ready way to Self-deceit, and that we are all of us too regardless of this so necessary a duty. Will you now say something of the *second* thing you mentioned, as not sufficiently thought on by us, *to wit*, the great design of the Christian religion, and shew me how our not well considering this also, tends to the deceiving of ourselves?

Min. Very willingly will I do it, and I hope as convincingly, seeing I conceive, that if you spend any time in reading the Gospel, and understand but indifferently what you therein read, you cannot choose but see how men deceive themselves, even throughout their whole conversation, under
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the name of Christians, by not considering enough what the Christian religion is, and what is the great design and main end of it. But as they enter into Christianity they know not how, even as they enter into the world, taking on them the profession of it in their infancy, when they cannot understand it; so they continue in the same profession they know not why, as if their entrance upon it in their infancy had obliged them to be infants still, and never to be men in understanding. Many amongst us can give no other reason why they continue in it, than this, that it is the profession of their parents, of their neighbours, and of their country, and is required of them by the laws of the land under which they live; and they have been taught to believe, that they, who live and die in this profession, shall be happy above other men.

Par. Methinks you speak as if you were mistaken in this; for you know we do not only make a blind profession of Christian religion as of an unknown thing, but we are catechized, and instructed in the principles and reasons of it, and therefore cannot be supposed so very ignorant, as not to know, in some good measure, both what we profess, and why we profess it.

Min. Some of you, I hope, know this; but too many, I am sure, do not. I say it by woful experience, some of you cannot repeat the words of a short *Catechism*, no not of the *Creed* or *Commandments*: others, that can say the words, can give no account of the sense of them; and many of them that can tell us, in some measure, what the words signify, and understand most of the things that are taught them, yet think no otherwise of the Christian religion, than as if it were only a device or expedient to set them free, and out of fear of that damnation which their sins have deserved;

deserved ; and that it requireth little more of them, but only to believe that, by the profession of it, they are safe, and past all danger of hell. Will you freely tell me what your own thoughts are concerning this ?

Par. I will, Sir, and I hope to your satisfaction. That which I take to be the main business of the Christian religion, is this, that we believe that God, of his goodness, is pleased to be merciful to sinners, and that he hath manifested this his wonderful grace and goodness to us, in sending us an all-sufficient *Saviour*, to save us from everlasting death ; that this Saviour of sinners is *Jesus Christ*, who died for our sins, and hath, by his death, purchased a full pardon for us. That he hath declared this unto us in his Gospel, *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*, Joh. iii. 16. And therefore we are to receive this Gospel, and read it, as the glad tidings of pardon and salvation, with all joyfulness of heart, and to thank God for this mercy. And that as often as we sin, we are to be heartily sorry for it, and to ask God forgiveness for Christ's sake, and not to doubt but for his sake God will forgive us. We are not to trust to any righteousness of our own, but to Christ's righteousness imputed freely to us, and are to fly unto his merits as to the only sanctuary of our sinful souls, to secure us from revenging justice, and to lay hold by faith on the act of indemnity, or free pardon, which he hath procured, and sealed with his blood on the cross, and caused to be published and proclaimed in his Gospel to this end, that we may not despair of mercy, nor doubt of the salvation of our souls by any sad reflection on our own unrighteousness.

Min. All this that you have said, if rightly understood, is very true and comfortable doctrine ;
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but to believe this, surely is not all that the Gospel of Christ requireth of you. Do you think that the design of Christianity is only to set you free from death, and to assure you that you are so freed, and to make you confident of salvation? Do you see in the Gospel no other righteousness belonging to Christians, but the imputed righteousness of Christ? Is it no part of the Gospel-design to make us righteous by an inherent righteousness in ourselves, but only by a righteousness without us in Christ?

Par. It becometh Christians indeed to be holy persons; but we have been taught to take heed of striving too much for a righteousness of our own, or of being too much troubled for the want of righteousness in ourselves, lest we should thereby seem to lessen or take from the freeness of God's grace, and the sufficiency of Christ's merits: but we are to remember that Christ died for the *ungodly*, and that's our only comfort.

Min. You have now shewn mens aptness to mistake, or not thoroughly to consider the design of the Gospel and Christianity. You take a part of it to be the whole; and it is well, if you misunderstand not that part too. The design of the Christian religion is to magnify the riches of God's goodness, in shewing unto sinners how yet, thro' Jesus Christ, they may attain unto salvation, notwithstanding the breach of the first covenant, and their disability, through the corruption of their nature, to serve God in perfect righteousness as they ought. But whilst men think so much of Christ's dying for the *ungodly*, as to persuade themselves that he will save them continuing in their ungodliness; and whilst they build so much upon a righteousness of Christ to be imputed to them, that they look upon it as needless to endeavour after a righteousness in themselves, they do but deceive

deceive themselves into vain hopes of that which will not be, and pretend to believe the Gospel in a thing which it never taught them.

Par. Be pleased to clear this that you say a little better unto me; for I had thought all along that we must be saved by the righteousness of Christ, and not by our own righteousness, and that it was the design of the Gospel to teach us this.

Min. Thus far, if this be your meaning, you are right, that it is the design of the Gospel to shew you, that you have no righteousness in yourselves, when you have done all that you can, that is so perfect as to be of itself acceptable to God, or rewardable by him, or for the imperfection whereof, and sinfulness accompanying it, he might not justly condemn you. But after all, you stand indeed in need of a pardon, which must come of God's mercy through the merits of Jesus Christ: yet if you think that you shall have the benefit of this pardon without any righteousness of your own, you are dangerously mistaken, and understand not the Gospel. The Apostle tells us, *That the grace of God hath appeared, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world,* Tit. ii. 11, 12. How little is this the care of many men that profess this holy Religion, to work their hearts into a more heavenly frame, and to mortify those lusts which are commonly, with all care, cherished and fed with whatever this world affordeth? Moreover, the apostle there tells us, v. 14. *That Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:* and he chargeth Titus, that he *speaks these things with all authority,* v. 15. The end of Christ's coming was not only that we should be delivered out of the hands of our enemies, but that *being delivered, we might*
serve

serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life, Luke i. 74, 75. He himself, that came to be our Saviour, hath not been sparing in telling us very fully, what he expecteth of all them that would have salvation by him. *Whosoever* (saith he) *will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*, Mark viii. 14. And again, *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love*, John xv. 10. The work of Christ is, by his holy Spirit, to beget us anew, and give us a new birth, that we may be new creatures, and begin the world anew in newness of life. *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*, John iii. 3. As naturally we are born of the flesh, and are flesh; so we must be spiritually born of the spirit, that we may be spirit, or spiritual men, v. 6. And as they that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh: so they that are after the spirit mind the things of the spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace, Rom. viii. 5, 6. *If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doth righteousness, is born of him*, 1 John ii. 29. But *whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God*, 1 John iii. 10. If we be Christians indeed, then is Christ formed in us, Gal. iv. 19. And we are to account it our greatest business to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. xiii. 14. not in name only, or in an outward profession of his Gospel, but as the new man, formed after God in righteousness and true holiness, Eph. iv. 24. So that henceforward we willingly yield our members servants to righteousness unto holiness, Rom. vi. 19. And make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. xiii. 14. What think you all such expressions as these, which are very many, do signify?

Par.

Par. They can signify no less than this, that we must have a righteousness of our own, without which Christ will not be our Saviour.

Min. You can confess no less. We are therefore to consider, that Christ came not only to redeem us from the curse, but to take us off from ourselves, and to redeem us out of that slavery, wherein our lusts do hold us, and to shew us God so lovely *in the face of Jesus Christ*, as it is, 2 Cor. iv. 6. that he may become the only desire of our souls. He came also to take us off from all mere formalities, and resting in outward observances, and to bring us to a truly spiritual frame of heart, *to worship God in spirit and in truth*, John iv. 24. and in all purity and integrity of heart, *to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service*, Rom. xii. 1.

Now whilst this great design of the Gospel is either not at all, or but slightly thought upon, it is no wonder to see men trot on in the world in a customary careless way of religion, coufening themselves into false hopes, and a groundless confidence of salvation in the end. Whilst this is so little considered as it is, they will content themselves with a mere shadow or *form* (if so much as a form) *of godliness*, but will not feel in themselves any thing of the *power* and virtue thereof, fitting them for that happiness which Jesus Christ hath purchased with his precious blood; yea, they will go on aggravating their own guilt and damnation by dishonouring, and even denying in deeds, whom in words they confess and magnify, turning the grace of God into wantonness, using their Christian liberty as an occasion to the flesh, and turning the savour of life unto life into the savour of death unto death: as though they were able to cheat Christ with as much ease as they are wont
to

to do themselves, and by a verbal flattery of calling him *Lord, Lord*, or by wearing his badge on their sleeves, make him believe that they are his friends and followers, retainers to his family, and wholly devoted to his service, when in very truth they are all this while intirely their own, or rather, for the love of themselves and their own flesh, the world's and the devil's.

Par. It is well if it be not with too many of us as you say.

Min. I shall, I hope, have a fitter opportunity hereafter to make you understand this better, when I come to shew you how men deceive themselves concerning their Baptism. You enter, you know, hereby upon the profession of Christianity.

Par. We do so: it is the way of entrance which Christ himself hath instituted.

Min. And do not you enter thereby into a sacred covenant with God?

Par. It is certain we do so.

Min. This then is all that I shall tell you at present, that whilst men consider not that they become Christians by entring into a solemn covenant with God, and that, according to the will and appointment of God, his own dear Son Jesus Christ offered himself to death to obtain this privilege for us, that neither our original sin, nor the numerous infirmities of our flesh, nor any sins, how heinous soever, that we have formerly committed, shall be charged upon us unto condemnation, so that we will unfeignedly enter into this covenant, and keep it: they deceive themselves with hope of salvation by Christ without any regard to the keeping of this covenant, wherein in Baptism they were solemnly engaged, as if this holy Sacrament were only a ceremonial solemnity of receiving a new name or honourable title, or the very name of Christian a

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powerful charm to secure them from hell and damnation.

Par. I now plainly discern how the not understanding, or not well considering, the design of Christianity, which is to make us holy as well as happy, must needs leave us exposed to Self-deceit. I hope I shall labour to make good use of, this that I have now learned, and so soon as I can, I will be bold to renew your trouble.



S E C T. VIII.

Inconsideration the way to SELF-DECEIT, farther shewn.

Min.  Elcome, neighbour; I hope you have nothing to object against what I told you at our last meeting.

Par. No, Sir : I thank God I am abundantly satisfied, that by not duly considering what God is to us, and what his gracious design for us is in the Gospel, we take the readiest course in the world to deceive ourselves.

Min. What is it then that you would now have satisfaction in ?

Par. You told me, that another way to deceive ourselves is, our not considering *the true nature of earthly things*. Methinks we, whose very calling holds us always busied about these things, so that we think almost of nothing else, should not be to seek in the true nature of them. They are, without all doubt, the good gifts of God, and we have much cause to be thankful for them.

Min.

Min. We have so indeed, and more than most of us are willing to see. But do you not think that these things may be abused by us, and that they are indeed abused by too many, to God's dishonour and our own hurt? And think you them truly thankful to God for them, who do so abuse them?

Par. There is no question but they may be, and are too often abused; and that in abusing them, men shew themselves unthankful to God for them.

Min. What do you conceive to be the reason, why men do so frequently and unthankfully abuse them?

Par. I cannot so readily tell you that, but am desirous to learn it of you.

Min. Their not considering the true nature of these things, is the reason why they understand not the right use of them; and their not understanding the right use of them, is one cause of their so grossly abusing them.

Par. I thought every body had understood the nature and use of earthly things, such as meat, drink, and cloaths, gold and silver, and such like; so that the ignorance or inconsideration of these things could not have led us into Self-deceit in matters of Religion.

Min. Do you suppose that Religion is no way concerned about such things as these, that so the ignorance of their nature and use should not deceive men, as to the truth and sincerity of their Religion?

Par. I thought Religion had consisted in believing, loving, and fearing God, in praying unto him, and praising him, hearing his word, and receiving the sacraments, and such like duties, and had nothing to do with worldly concerns.

Min. In this you are grossly deceived, and, I fear, so are many more besides you; whence they are very confident, that they are very religious and godly persons, if they pray and hear often, though they be very regardless how they behave themselves in the use of earthly things. But you should know, that Religion comprehends not only those duties of piety which we perform immediately to God, but all the duties which we owe unto our neighbours and ourselves, those of righteousness and sobriety; which though they respect other men, or ourselves more immediately, yet are they duties to God, and to be done in obedience to him, and to his honour and glory, and so are parts of Religion.

Par. I thought that such duties as these had belonged to *morality*; and the men that are eminent in such duties, we commonly call *moral* men, but not *godly*, or *religious* men.

Min. What you call them it matters not: St. James tells you, that *to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, is religion*, Jam. i. 27. And accordingly as men have performed or neglected such duties, as cloathing the naked, and feeding the hungry, and such like, shall they receive their reward at the last day, *Matt. xxiv.*

Par. Is there no difference then betwixt *Religion* and *Morality*?

Min. You speak, I suppose, of the *Christian Religion*, when you ask me this question, otherwise I shall not answer it, because it will not be of much use to you to have it resolved.

Par. I am not concerned in any other *Religion* but the *Christian*.

Min. Then I answer you very briefly; The same acts of duty may be acts of mere morality, and acts of *Christian morality*. He that performeth acts of virtue, moved thereunto only by his
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own natural reason, because he judgeth them becoming him as a man, and a member of human society, and good in their own nature, and useful or beneficial to the world, and he would not sink below the dignity of mankind in base and unreasonable actions, nor lives as an useless or hurtful thing in the world, this man acts from principles of morality, and you may call him thus far a moral man. Again, he that exerciseth the same acts of virtue, and partly from the same principles, as unwilling to debase himself into a beast, but in all his performances is also and chiefly acted by nobler and higher principles, to wit, the sense of his obligation and duty to God, faith in Christ, and a desire to express his love and gratitude to God, by honouring and obeying him according to his own will declared by Jesus Christ, this man acts from principles of the Christian Religion, and is a religious man and a Christian. Therefore not to trouble you with distinctions and niceties, which you will hardly be made to understand, I will tell you in short what I take to be sufficient for you to know as to this matter :

“ To do such acts not only in compliance with
“ our own inclinations, but from a conviction of
“ the obligation lying upon us in all things to
“ obey the will of God, not by the sole direction
“ of our own reason, but by rules given us in
“ God’s word ; not presuming of our own natural
“ ability to perform them acceptably to God,
“ but praying to him for the assistance of his
“ spirit ; designing in them not our own praise,
“ or honour, or worldly advantage, neither only
“ the satisfaction of our own minds, or the good
“ of mankind, but principally the honour and
“ glory of God ; and finally, not trusting to the
“ worth of our own doings for a reward from
“ God as a due debt, but in the promise of a

“ pardon for our failings, and a gracious acceptance of our imperfect duties, for the merits “ and through the mediation of *Jesus Christ*. ” To do moral duties thus, is to make them all acts of the Christian Religion ; and he that doth not so, though he pretend never so much to godliness on other accounts, is not indeed a religious Christian.

Par. I thank you for shewing me so plainly my mistake, and beg your pardon for giving this interruption to the discourse you were entering upon.

Min. Now, I hope, you see, that the duties of honesty or justice and sobriety are Christian duties, no less than those of piety, strictly so called.

Par. You have made me see it very plainly.

Min. And you cannot but know, that the exercise of these virtues consisteth very much in the use of those which we call earthly or worldly things.

Par. No man can deny that.

Min. Then it necessarily follows, that our not considering the nature and use of these things, must needs be the ready way to deceive ourselves in weighty matters of Religion.

Par. I am now convinced of this also, and therefore desire you next to shew me how we fail in considering the use of these things.

Min. There be two things to be well considered by us concerning these things, which, I fear, we generally too little think on. *First*, for what uses God, of his great goodness, did at first design these things. *Secondly*, what these things, since the creation, are become unto us by sin. He that doth not well consider both these, will be apt to make every thing, that he meets with upon earth, a snare unto himself.

Par.

Par. Will you take a little pains to shew me how these things become snares to us, for want of considering for what uses God made them?

Min. By not considering this, men finding by experience the usefulness and the comfort of these things for their bodily sustenance and refreshment, are apt to please themselves with thinking that all these things of service and delight, wherewith this inferior world, by God's good providence, is very richly furnished, were made merely for their bodily good, to be used at their pleasure, that they may freely take their fill of them, and without all check or controll, or being afterwards called to an account, enjoy and delight themselves in them.

Par. May we not freely use the good things which God hath provided for our use, and delight in them?

Min. It is most certain, that these things were not made so useful by God in vain, as they were, if we might not use them, and enjoy the good that is in them. They may be freely used by us, but it must be according to their true nature: they may be valued by us, but it must be according to their real worth: we may endeavour to reap to ourselves the good that is in them, but we must seek for no more in them than God hath put into them. God had not indued them with so many virtues, and good and profitable qualities, whereby they are many ways fitted for our use, if he had not intended we should seek that profit and benefit by them, which, by his blessing, they may afford us: neither had he made them so lovely and pleasant, nor made us so capable of finding pleasure in them, had he not intended we should love them as far as they are lovely, and take pleasure in them as they are delightful. God hath not set us in this world of his good creatures,

to *tantalize* us, or torment us daily with desires unto things present and suitable to our appetites, not giving us leave to touch or enjoy them. No, we have a most free and bountiful God and Master to serve, who alloweth us all things needful in great abundance; and grudgeth us not any thing that is really good for us. But we also serve a wise God, who will govern as well as feed his family, and giveth us rules to observe, as well as mercies to enjoy; and he expects that we should eat in due season, in that proportion, and by those rules which he hath given us, and not disoblige ourselves, by feasting on his bounty, to do him the service which he expects from us. So long then as we keep ourselves within those just bounds and limits which our God, the great Maker, and wise Governor and Orderer both of them and us, hath set us, and carefully observe the rules and directions which he hath prescribed for our following in the use of them, we may cheerfully use them, and hope to find much good in them. It is not now my purpose to give you all the rules which God hath given us in his word for the right use of earthly things, but only to inform you, that unless you understand and observe those rules, you will, in the use of them, deceive yourself. Something yet in general I find it needful now to warn you of concerning the use of them.

Par. What you think good, Sir; I am ready to hearken unto what you think now most seasonable to teach me.

Min. First then, you must take heed how you think that any thing here below, how good and useful soever it be, was made by God to be man's happiness or portion.

Par. What is the danger of so thinking?

Min.

Min. Very great; for if you think so, you must think it reasonable to seek your happiness in them, and rest in them as your portion, and so you will deceive yourself.

Par. If they were not made to be our happiness, for what were they made?

Min. To be your present relief, and to support your nature whilst you are travelling upon earth in the way to happiness, and labouring for your eternal portion. If you consider not this, you will be too apt to overvalue them, and seek for that in them which God never placed so low.

Par. This, I must confess, to be a very needful caution; for I should find myself very wretched in the end, should I spend all my days in seeking my happiness where it is not to be found.

Min. I have another caution yet to give you, as useful as this: Take heed, in the next place, how you think that God made all this great variety of good things for no other use to you, than those which men commonly put them to.

Par. We use them for our bodily sustenance, health, strength, refreshment and comfort. Can there be any other use of them?

Min. Yes, there is, and a principal one too, which whilst you consider not, you certainly deceive yourselves in the use of them.

Par. I cannot imagine what you should mean by it.

Min. I am very sorry for your ignorance, which, I fear, is too common to you with many of your neighbours. How can you hope to glorify God in the use of his good creatures, if you understand not this, that God made them not only for your bodies, but also for your souls, to be as so many looking-glasses always before your eyes, wherein you may discern and contemplate very much of your Creator's image, much of his power, wisdom

dom and goodness, that you may admire, praise and love him more. Every creature we behold, should be an help to us to direct our thoughts up unto God, the author of all goodness, as the streams may direct us to the fountain, and we should taste and see in every thing, how great, and wise, and good the Lord is ; and by the benefit we reap from every thing, we should be encouraged, and daily more and more oblige ourselves, to honour and serve so good and bountiful a God. If this be not well considered, we shall be too prone to rest in them, and love them only for themselves, or only for the bodily benefits we have from them, and idolize them, placing those affections of love, delight and admiration, on the creatures, which are due only to the Creator, and which even by them we should be directed to place upon him only.

Par. I perceive now very plainly my great ignorance herein, and sufficiently see the mischief of not considering for what uses God hath been pleased to afford us these things. You promised to shew me also what these things are now become to us by sin, and what is the evil of not considering that.

Min. I did so, and shall now make good my promise as well as I can to you, in a very few words, so far as is needful at present ; for I shall hereafter, I hope, have occasion to shew you this more fully. God, at the creation, made every thing very good, and exceeding fit for all the purposes for which it was created. But man's sin and disobedience to his Maker, hath, in a great measure, marred the virtue, as well as the beauty, of the creatures, as to us ; insomuch, that those things, which were made to be helps to us in our way to happiness, are now become the greatest hindrances ; and what was made to be our bodily food,

food, is become poison to our souls; which, tho' it have no fatal operation on such as have their hearts defended against it by the sovereign antidote of God's grace, yet will certainly produce sad effects in every un sanctified soul. For whilst by that sweetness to sense which men taste in the creatures, they are tempted to transgress the limits which God hath set, and the rules which he hath given, and to feed upon them too greedily, they deceive themselves thereby into a deadly surfeit. It is this *deceitfulness of riches*, pleasures, and other worldly things, which *choaketh the word*, Matt. xiii. 22. which is the seed of saving knowledge and spiritual life, so that it bringeth no good fruit to perfection in us. The love of the world, and of the things that are in the world, having once got rooting in our hearts, will, like an ill weed in a garden, so spread and over-run all, that it will not suffer the love of the Father to grow and thrive in it.

This is all that I shall now say of this argument, expecting a fitter opportunity to enlarge upon it. But if your affairs will permit you so long a stay, I would willingly say something to you at this time of the last of those *four* things, the not well considering whereof doth cause the abounding of Self-deceit.

Par. Although I am seldom without business enough to keep me doing, yet I have none at this time, but I can easily dispense with it, in consideration of the benefit I hope for by that which we are now about: proceed therefore to what you think most needful now to be added.

Min. That which I shall now mind you of, is *our great neglect of meditating much upon our latter end, and that future eternal state which follows this short life.* We know that we must not live many years longer where now we are, but death will
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call us all hence, and we know not how soon; and we know, if we believe the word of God, that when we die, we are not at an end of our being, but we must be for ever, and that either happy or miserable; and farther yet, that our endless happiness or misery depends upon our present behaviour in this world. I hope you grant all this.

Par. I cannot do otherwise, and profess myself a Christian.

Min. Then you will grant also, that the considering or not considering all this as we ought, must needs have a mighty influence upon our life and conversation in this world.

Par. It must, without all dispute; for it is the hope of what we love, and the fear of what we hate, that makes us careful in all we do.

Min. What is it, I pray, that you hope for after death? For to that only I shall limit my discourse with you now.

Par. I hope for perfect happiness and unspeakable joys in heaven.

Min. This is it that we all pretend to hope for, and labour after; but if we understand not the nature of that happiness and joy, but fancy it to be another thing than it is, or if competently understanding it we so much disregard it as to think but little of it, will it have that influence upon us as it should have, to bias and over-rule our conversation?

Par. That cannot, in any reason, be expected by us.

Min. And yet thus, I fear, it is with many of us; we are so generally plunged into flesh, and have so in a manner lost our souls in our bodies, and even use so to bury the thoughts of heaven in the earth, which we are always rooting in, that we can hardly be made in earnest sensible that we are
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any thing else but flesh, and blood, and bones ; nor can we, without some violence to our minds, be brought to a serious belief or persuasion, that there are any other kind of joys or delights, than such only as we have here been too long and too intimately acquainted with, such, I mean, as arise in us from the satisfaction of our sensitive appetites ; and therefore, whenever we are put in mind of the blessedness and joys of heaven, and a future life, we have much ado to conceive them to be of any other kind or nature, than these are of, which we now feel in ourselves, as often as we are greatly pleased with the things of this present world ; but are apt to believe they can be nothing else, but even all the same joys amassed together, and that in the highest degree, together with an uninterrupted and everlasting possession of them, whereof I told you something before, when I shewed you what I meant by Self-deceit.

Par. I remember you did so: but I still hope that there are few so grossly deceived, as to hope that they shall find earth in heaven, or that there are the same things there to be rejoyced in, which they now rejoyce in upon earth.

Min. I know not whether any one think or hope so, or no ; but I am sure a great many seem, by the course of life they lead, to hope for no better, seeing they take no pains to prepare their souls for any other kind of joys, but rather go on so to habituate themselves to earthly joys, as that it must needs be a grief, and no joy, to be parted from them, and that they will be made incapable of rejoycing in any thing without these: so that they must either hope for the same joys, or others like them, or none at all, and then what's become of their heaven and happiness?

Par.

Par. God forbid it should be indeed, as you say it seems unto you to be! Surely none can expect to meet with earthly joys in heaven.

Min. I am apt too to think, that not many (I dare not say none) do expect to find earthly things in heaven to rejoyce in, as if it were but a *Turkish Paradise*, or Poetical *Elizium*: But whether so, or no, I fear very many think of no other pleasures there, but the pleasures of sense, or such pleasures of mind, as now arise from sensible things. And indeed, how should they, whilst they know no other, and whilst they account spiritual joys, such as are all the joys of heaven, a mere fancy of melancholy men? But seeing you think this imagination too gross for any man to entertain, will you let me know what thoughts you have of that blessed state; because, though they be not such as now I mention, yet they may possibly not be right, seeing there are more dangerous misapprehensions of the nature of that state of happiness than one, and I would not willingly leave you under any of them.

Par. I thank you for your charity, and will tell you my mind freely; for, I hope, I think of heaven as all men should do. Heaven I take to be a place of perfect blessedness.

Min. But what is it you mean by perfect blessedness?

Par. What else should I mean by it, but the salvation of our souls?

Min. I know no more what you mean than I did before, till you shew me what it is that salvation, in your own sense of it, signifieth. What is that which you call by the name of salvation?

Par. By salvation I understand thus much, that in heaven we shall be saved, or set safe out of the reach of all those evils which men are wont to suffer in this world, and also from all those which

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we are now in great fear of suffering after death; and we shall enjoy all the good things that our hearts can wish for, so that we can desire no more; and this I think to be true and perfect happiness; for what more can it be, than a freedom from all evil, and an enjoyment of all good? This I told you in sense before.

Min. It can be no more, that's certain; this is the true notion of happiness. But yet you have not told me what the greatest evil is from which we shall be freed, nor what that good is which we shall then enjoy; and till you understand this, you have but a very confused notion of heavenly happiness; neither will you know how you are to be prepared and qualified for the enjoyment of it.

Par. Yes, surely, we know that, or else we are in a very sad condition indeed: for no man can hope to be happy in heaven, that doth not prepare himself for it.

Min. How must you prepare yourselves for it?

Par. By doing our duty, that is, by *faith* and *repentance*, and by *keeping God's commandments*.

Min. How you *believe*, and *repent*, and *obey*, I may possibly help you to examine a little better hereafter, and to see how apt men are to deceive themselves in thinking they do so, when they do not. Now let me only warn you to take heed that you do your duties so, as that you may be thereby prepared for heaven.

Par. What is it, I beseech you, that you would have us do?

Min. You must labour to be such men as can do duties acceptably to God through Jesus Christ, *that is*, truly sanctified persons. This is too little the care of most men; they labour not after a right understanding of the necessary qualifications of a Christian, nor for such a frame and temper

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of spirit as God requireth ; and so long they may do, after a sort, many of those things that God requireth, but cannot do them in such a manner as God will accept and reward, and so do no duties indeed, which God will account of as duties, neither are one jot the more prepared for heaven by all that they do, though they think it very much. What this temper of heart is, I will shew in due season : in the mean time I will tell you what, I fear, you think to be enough to prepare you for happiness.

Par. I am content to hear your thoughts of our performances.

Min. I suppose you know that there are some things commanded by God, which you are bound to do upon pain of death ; and that some things are forbidden by God, which, on the same penalty, you are bound not to do : you know therefore that it is both your duty and great concern, both to do the one, and not to do the other ; and this most of you look upon as a very burdensome and (for that) unwelcome task, which you had rather be freed from, if you could tell how ; but but because it is made necessary, and you must do it, or die, and a condition to be observed by all that desire to be happy, and you see there is no hope of obtaining the blessedness promised, or escaping the punishment threatened, without performing it, you set about it with much uneasiness ; and however it be done, willingly or unwillingly, with such a heart as God requires, or no, you are willing to hope it will be accepted. And this seems to be the highest pitch of knowledge, both of your future happiness, and of your present preparation for it, that many, even of them who are accounted a better sort of Christians, have yet attained unto.

Par.

Par. I understand not yet what it is that you think needful for us to know more than this. We know what God hath commanded and forbidden, and we labour to obey him in both. We know that he hath promised blessedness to the obedient, and we trust to his promise. What more is needful, I cannot yet see.

Min. If you do not, I wish you did; and I hope you will anon. This indeed is the Self-deceit of most men; so something of the outward part of duty be done, they little regard how their hearts are affected. How they are to be inwardly qualified and disposed, and made capable of tasting and delighting in those celestial joys before-mentioned, or how the commands and prohibitions of God may tend thus to dispose and fit them for their future happiness, or how to habituate themselves beforehand to a spiritual gust and relish of those things which are in heaven to be their eternal delight, they are utterly ignorant, and will, by no arguments, be persuaded to learn.

Par. I hope you will not find me so unwilling to learn hereafter, as I have been negligent hitherto. Let me intreat you therefore, as plainly as you can, to inform my understanding in these things, which you say are so needful to be considered, and whereof you think me yet ignorant.

Min. I will, by God's help, satisfy your desire. And that I may make you understand wherein your happiness must lie, I must first tell you wherein lieth your misery.

Par. Wherein lieth it?

Min. The root of all our misery is the corruption of our nature, and of our natural powers, and the alienation or turning away of our hearts and affections from God and holiness. God himself is the only perfect and satisfactory good, and the enjoyment of God is the only thing that can
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make us completely happy, and holiness is the only thing that can qualify and fit us for the enjoyment of God. Whilst therefore our natural corruption keeps us unholy, we cannot enjoy God; and so long as we enjoy not God, but are estranged from him, we are miserable.

Par. I am very well satisfied in the truth of this; what is it that you would now infer from this?

Min. That if you will not spend your days in Self-deceit, you must consider well the nature of eternal blessedness, and by that consideration be excited and directed unto a due preparation for it. You must remember in the *first* place, that perfect blessedness is nothing else but a full and delightful enjoyment of God himself in those more clear and glorious manifestations and communications of himself unto us, which will be in the other world, and in a mutual suitableness of the all-glorious God and our glorified souls resting for ever in his presence, through the pleasant and ravishing sense whereof we shall be ever filled with the most perfect knowledge and sweetest love of him, the most complete and endless satisfaction of heart and complacency in him, and the most intimate communion with him that is possible to be betwixt God and such creatures: To this end our nature shall be perfectly renewed, and all that corruption of it, whereby we are now so strongly inclined, and even violently hurried on to those pleasures which we feel in earthly things, and which wholly indisposeth us to delight in God and holiness, shall be rooted out by a total extirpation. There shall be such a complete cure and rectitude of all our faculties, that we shall cease any more to desire or delight in these low things, and be rendered perfectly capable of being most highly pleased and ravished with those heavenly and divine objects, wherein now, because of our corruption,

ruption, we can discern so little beauty and loveliness. Do you understand this?

Par. I hope I do, in some good measure.

Min. Then you understand what is meant, when 'tis said we shall enjoy all that is good in heaven; we shall be perfectly delighted in God and holiness, and be, by perfect holiness, made like unto God: and also what is to be understood by our being then freed from all evil; we shall be freed from the corruption of our nature, from all sinful inclinations, and all possibility thereby of being separated from God and holiness any more, and you may be sure that all other evils we can now fear, will vanish with this.

Par. I perceive that happiness is not the satisfaction of such desires as now we commonly have, but of such as we ought, and were made by God, to have, as you before taught me.

Min. You must therefore well consider what your preparation for this state of blessedness must be, even a continual study and endeavour after holiness. It is purity of heart, and its being daily more and more purged from earthly, carnal, and vile affections and lusts, and increasing in the knowledge and love of God, that must fit and make us capable subjects of heavenly pleasures. The not considering of this, layeth us open to many errors in our present conversation.

Par. Though I perceive that it must needs do so, yet I understand it not so well, as not to need your farther help; will you therefore shew me how?

Min. Whilst we consider not this, we are apt to go on at best but in a daily performance of some outward acts of duty, as a customary and necessary task imposed upon us, hoping, that when our working days on earth are at an end, we shall have a perpetual holiday in heaven, when

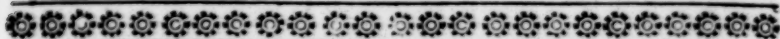
we shall be at rest, and receive the reward which Christ hath purchased for us, and promised to give unto all that follow him to the end. But little care or pains will be taken about the principal things, which is, to wean ourselves from earthly vanities, to change our hearts and affections, or to *mortify our members that are upon the earth*, Cor. iii. 5. Faint and cold prayers will be poured out unto God, to *create in us clean hearts, and to renew right spirits within us*, Psal. li. 10. Very little labouring will there be to bring ourselves gradually to that healthful state and right complexion of soul and spirit, which is the right temper of a Christian, so as to be able to favour and taste those spiritual joys, which should be the beginning of our heaven here upon earth. Without this consideration, we shall never be able to comfort ourselves in that promise of our blessed Jesus, *Matt. v. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* It is this purity of heart, and its being daily more and more purged from all dissimulation and hypocrisy, from all unclean desires, and sinful affections, that prepareth us for seeing God.

Par. Alas! we can never hope to have such souls, whilst we live in this wicked world; but we hope we shall at death be changed and fitted for glory.

Min. I do not go about to make you believe we can be perfectly holy in this life; but the apostle tells us our duty very plainly in 2 Cor. vii 1. *Having therefore these promises (dearly beloved) let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* We have the promises of eternal life, but we must be fitted for it by holiness; we cannot here be quite clean, but we must be cleansing ourselves from all filthiness; we cannot be perfectly holy, but we must

must be perfecting holiness. And if our hearts be not thus prepared by a gradual purifying whilst we live, we can have no reason to hope that death should have that virtue in it, as to change them all on a sudden from uncleanness to holiness, so that he, who dieth a beast, shall rise again a saint. But the holy love and delight in God and holiness, must be now begun, and carried on by degrees towards perfection, so that we may be able to say, whilst we live here, with *St. Paul*, *Phil. iii. 20.* That *our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.* This is our very business for which we live, to *purify ourselves, as God is pure*, in hope of *seeing him as he is*, *John iii. 2, 3.* We are to maintain a constant communion with God, and be daily conversing with him, longing for more and fuller communications of him to our souls. If these things be not well considered, men will be apt to fancy themselves not far from the kingdom of God, when as yet they never came within prospect of it. Hope they will, that they shall be happy, when as yet that which is to be man's happiness, is a thing as contrary to the temper and inclination of their souls, as contrary to all that they can yet delight in, as sweet is to bitter, or white to black. The brightness of heavenly glory can suit no better with them, than the bright noon-day's sun with the night-eyed owl.

Par. I now plainly see the mischief of inconsideration. O how boldly and blindly do we go on to destruction in hope of salvation, so long as we consider not whither we go ! I thank you heartily for the discovery you have now made unto me ; and, I hope, when we shall have a new opportunity, you will not grudge me your help farther, to discern the deceitfulness of my heart ; at present I will trouble you no longer.



S E C T. IX.

*The neglect of Self-examination a way
to SELF-DECEIT.*

Min.



Eighbour, you are come very seasonably ; I was wishing for your company, now that I am at leisure to talk with you.

Par. I am glad I have hit upon so fit a time ; and I am not willing to lose any of it in impertinent discourse. Having therefore, I suppose, said as much as you intended of Inconsideration, be pleased now to tell me some of those other ways, whereby we are apt to deceive ourselves.

Min. Men deceive themselves by *neglecting the knowledge and consideration of God* ; and they deceive themselves no less by *neglecting the knowledge and consideration of themselves*.

Par. Of themselves ! Whatever pains is required to come to the true knowledge of God, a little surely is enough to bring us to the knowledge of ourselves ; if we know any thing, we must needs know ourselves.

Min. Let me tell you, and believe it, this is no such easy matter as you seem to account it, most of us are very ignorant of ourselves, and are no where so great strangers as at home. We are acquainted almost with every thing better than with our own hearts. Thus, I say, I really fear, the case stands with the most of us. Whatever
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else men labour to know, they are very well content to know themselves at second hand only. They are pleased to believe themselves to be what others, either flatteringly call them, or charitably think them, without ever once trying whether they are in truth so, or not.

Par. I know not what should make a man unwilling to know himself.

Min. Yet the truth is, and it is a sad truth, that men are generally very loth to know themselves. They are as unwilling to look curiously into their own breasts, as they are to have casements made in them for others to see what foul things lodge there. Men live as if they were afraid of nothing more than to know themselves too well, lest they should begin to have a worse opinion of themselves than they are willing to have. If most of us did but see all that filth and rottenness that lodgeth within our hearts, we would begin in earnest to loath ourselves, and that's a thing we now loath most of any thing; yea, no sight would be more frightful to us, than to see ourselves in our own true shapes as we are sinners, so much of the devil would presently appear in us. It is a wonderful thing to see how negligent we are all of us in the great and most necessary duty of *Self-examination*, when we cannot be ignorant, if we consider any thing at all of religion, how nearly it concerneth us to see that we be such as we ought to be. It is too plain, that whilst we do not examine ourselves, we cannot know ourselves; and whilst we do not know ourselves, we must needs deceive ourselves; and that indeed is the only reason that many of us have to think well of ourselves, *viz.* our ignorance of ourselves, and we are apt to hope all is well, only because we were never at the pains of examining ourselves to find what is amiss.

Par. I cannot but yield to you in that, we are all too careless in examining ourselves; yet we do it sometimes, especially before a Sacrament-day.

Min. That's too seldom by much, except Sacraments were much more frequent. But, I fear, that which most do then, very ill deserves the name of Self-examination.

Par. We examine our repentance, our purpose to lead a new life, our faith in God's mercy thro' Christ, and our being in charity with all men.

Min. You ask yourselves, it may be, whether you repent, believe, &c. and you answer as readily, that you do; and then you think you have examined yourselves sufficiently.

Par. We do not answer ourselves that we do so, except we find that we do so indeed; that were to deceive ourselves without doubt.

Min. But how do you find that you do so? Do you, by the word of God, first endeavour to learn what the graces signify, and to understand all things that are requisite to the truth and sincerity of them; and having found this, do you inquire whether you find all those things in yourselves? And do you observe all your own defects and failings in every one of them, whether in the habits, or in the exercises, of the acts of these graces? I must needs say, I am afraid many of you are so far from examining yourselves to any better purposes than the deceiving of yourselves, that very few of you understand what such examination meaneth, or how you are to go about it. I speak this of mine own certain knowledge, by examining some of you myself, I have found that some of them, who were most confident of themselves, did not know so much as what the things are wherein they should examine themselves, so little could they examine whether they had them, or no.

Par.

Par. We examine ourselves as well as we can, and we hope that God requireth no more of us, than we are able to do: we judge of ourselves by the best light we have.

Min. God requireth of you, that you be able, when he offereth you strength, and that you judge rightly by a sufficient light, when himself hath set up a light before you, and given you eyes, and will not admit of this excuse, that you do as well as you can, when you may be able to do better, if you will; or that you go by the best light you have, when you have a better light by you, and will not use it. And how indeed you can excuse yourselves, even to yourselves, for so gross a neglect of this duty, I cannot but wonder.

Par. What do you mean in saying so?

Min. I think it strange, that men should be so busy in examining how things stand with them in relation to their temporal estates, and should keep an account of their incomes and expences, and consider oft how rich or how poor they are, what they have to pay their rents with, or to maintain their families, or to provide for their children, and yet regard so little their spiritual state, how rich or how poor they are in grace, how the accounts stand betwixt God and them, what they are indebted to him, what they have to support their hopes, and what provision they have laid in for their souls. When I observe how curiously inquisitive men use to be into other matters, so that they would not willingly, could they tell how to prevent it, let any thing escape them, without an over-curious prying into it. What an immoderate itch of curiosity have many men of digging into the very bowels of nature, to discover all her hidden treasures? How much over-busy and pragmatICAL are most of us, in most narrowly observing all the words and actions, yea, and too
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boldly conjecturing and judging of the secret thoughts and inclinations, of other men? How scrupulously ceremonious, to the utmost height of excess, are many, in framing and shaping their outward gestures, habits and dresses to the humours of their neighbours, so that they count it a disgrace that any one should be able to carp at them, or say that a foot or hand moves not modestly, that a hair or a pin stands not in fashionable order? When I think on this, which I almost daily see, I cannot but admire how remiss, and even altogether careless, we generally are in searching into our own hearts, and looking well to the posture and habit of our souls: so that by our general negligence herein, we may well administer occasion unto some, to question whether we be not altogether ignorant, whether we have any such things in us as souls, or no; or else to conclude, that we are afraid to lose ourselves, by diving into the unknown depths of our own wicked hearts.

Par. I hope this neglect proceeds only from forgetfulness, and the multitude of worldly business, which crowds in upon us, and not from any either unwillingness or fear to know ourselves.

Min. If it come from the former, as you hope, it is bad enough, as shewing a very unreasonable disregard and undervaluing of our souls, and all our spiritual concerns. But were this duty performed so often as it ought, would we every evening cast up that day's account, the work would become so familiar and easy, and we should grow so well acquainted with ourselves, that it would not call for much time, or hinder any considerable business. And that we do not make it thus easy, seems to imply no less than this, that we are unwilling to forego that stupid kind of
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quiet and peace of mind for which we are beholden only to our ignorance of ourselves and of the dangers we are continually in. We are therefore afraid to be too stirring in this work, lest we should thereby awake our consciences, which would presently fly in our faces, and revenge our neglect of them, by a continual reproaching and lashing of us.

Par. Now that you have minded me of it, I can say no less, but I could wish that it were not so.

Min. I need not now say much to shew you how we are hereby daily exposed to *Self-deceit*. Whilst we are unwilling or afraid to enter boldly into the secrets of our hearts, lest, as the prophet in his vision, the farther we proceed, the more and greater abominations we should discover, and thereupon rest ourselves content with some light glancings only upon ourselves as we pass along in our common course and road of formality, presuming that there can be nothing of hell within, so long as we see no monstrous *Cerberus* at the gate, no notorious branded sin openly in our conversation; it must needs be that we are deceived in ourselves, and having no familiar and intimate acquaintance with our own hearts, we pass on the way securely, persuaded that we have escaped the devil, and are beyond all danger, till suddenly and unawares he assault us, even out of these hearts of ours, wherein he lay all this while in close ambush, watching his fittest opportunity to ruin us.

Par. I see that it will concern us to make a very diligent search, and that not seldom, but frequently into ourselves, and to *take heed lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*, Heb. iii. 12. *And to keep our hearts with all diligence*, Prov. iv. 23. And that I may be moved to the greater care herein, I desire to hear something more particularly of the evils which ensue this neglect of examining ourselves.

Min.

Min. The evil consequences of this neglect particularly to enumerate, is more than I am able to do. But some few things I shall say whereby you may discern it to be very evil. If I should say no more but this, it must needs be enough to a rational man ; you know not what is amiss in you, and take no care to have it amended ; you know not what you want, and therefore never seek it ; you know not what you have, and cannot thank God for it ; you know not what you do, and whether any thing of it be acceptable to God ; you know not what you are, and cannot tell what you may hope for. And is not all this enough to speak the evil of this neglect ? If you would hear more, I tell you, that he who doth not well examine himself, cannot experimentally know the true life, vertue and power of grace, and therefore in all his duties he is apt to magnify whatsoever he doth, and for his own performances to seem very great and fair in his own eyes, whilst he is vile and worse than nothing in the eyes of God. He hath his eyes always fixed upon the fair side of himself only, and by the pleasing contemplation thereof, is apt to fall deeply in love with himself ; and if it be true that love is blind, there is no love so blind as self-love. The outside of the painted sepulchre is mighty pleasing, and such an one hath no lifting, nor indeed a spiritual eye able to pierce through that outside, be it never so thin a varnish of formality, to observe all the ugliness and rottenness, the body of sin, the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts which lie within. He prayeth it may be, and not seldom neither, after his rate of praying ; he fasteth sometimes, and giveth alms ; he is punctual and just, and honest in his ordinary dealings with men ; it may be too, that no man keepeth church more constantly then he, or worshippeth God according
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to all the several offices of the church more frequently : yea, and possibly no man serves his country more freely and industriously, or leads a more temperate and sober life. All these things are good and useful in themselves, fair to see to, and plausible among men : and now what is there (will such a man say) that any man can do more than I do in obedience to the laws of God or man ? Either I am in a good way, or all men are in a bad one. And yet all this while he knows not what is within him, he understands not that which is wanting to make him a good Christian, and for want of examining his own heart. Whence all this flourish of seeming religion cometh, he never considereth ; whether he have in him the true principles of Christian action, or whether all this, that after a sort he performeth, do not proceed from those lower and more common principles from which it is even a shame for a Christian to act. He considereth not, whether all that he doth be designed purely to the right end of glorifying God, or to other base ends of serving himself only. And thus, though the things that he doth may be very good to others, and profitable to himself in relation to this present world, yet do they not all prove him to be a good Christian, or tend to his future happiness, but only help him to undo himself. He is at a great deal of pains to deceive himself.

Par. This indeed is very sad, that a man should take a great deal of pains to do good, and yet in all he doth, do himself the greatest hurt that can be ; and yet I see it must needs be so, if he do not examine himself to discover his failings.

Min. Farther yet, whilst a man knows not his own heart, for want of a due examination of himself, he is apt to think all his faults and vices to be very small and inconsiderable, and such as shall
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never be laid to his charge unto condemnation. Because they are, it may be, for the most part, such as do no great hurt to others in the world about him ; they are mostly sins of omission of the due exercises of piety and devotion ; or they are irregular and corrupt performances of such things as really are duties and do good, and become sinful to the performer of them by his disorderly doing of them ; he is apt never to observe them, not to see what matter of repentance and humility they afford him. In short, he that is not very diligent to enquire into the sincerity of his heart, and regularity of his actions, hath numberless ways of imposing upon himself a very good opinion of his own state towards God and in relation to eternal life and happiness. Not only all he doth that is any way good seems to him to be very good, and all the evil that he is guilty of, be it never so much, seems very little ; but if ever he have formerly done any good thing, it is apt to run so much in his thought, and to look so great in his eyes, that he cannot take notice of any evil that he hath since committed. A very little thing with the help of self-love will persuade a man that he is a very good and godly man ; and when he is once thus persuaded of himself, it is no little thing that will be able to put him out of conceit with himself again, how bad soever really he be. If he chance sometimes to be started by any accident into a more serious consideration, and thereupon begin a little to doubt of his sincerity, yet such doubts are nothing with him, and blown away with a blast of breath. What (saith he to himself) shall I now begin to make my life uncomfortable to me when I need not ? Grace can never be lost when once we have it ; I once had grace, else I could not have done what I did, and therefore I have it still, and am safe. That once
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he had grace, a very slender appearance of it was enough to convince him, and whatever hath appeared since that time to the contrary, he concludes it can be no more than infirmity common to the best of men, and pardonable of course. Once he was a child of God, that he makes himself sure of; and it is a comfortable persuasion, he is unwilling to part with it; and that God sees no sin in his children, he hath been made to believe very easily, because he would have it so; and hence he infers, that it would be a foolish thing to be very curious in enquiring whether he be so now, or whether any sin he have committed can put him out of God's favour. What once he was, the same he is now, and must be so for ever, for the gift and grace of God is without repentance.

Once more, when such a man finds that he hath done something that is evil, yet is he ready to flatter himself with this conceit, that though such a thing would be a great sin in another, yet it is none at all in him. For why? He hath, he supposeth, a good end in what he doth, he means honestly by it, and hath no other design but to honour God: A pure intention must needs make a pure heart, and purity of heart will hallow or sanctify all his actions. All that he doth, is to promote some very great good, as it seems to him; or to prevent some very great evil, and that is very good; and therefore to step a little aside out of the way of God's commandments, to take up a jewel of great worth, can be no great fault; nor can he bring his mind, without much violence, to believe, that it can be any great evil whereby so great a good is promoted.

Nay, such an one is apt to think every little purpose that he finds in himself of being good, a sufficient argument to convince him that he is good; and every little thought of honouring God
that

that comes into his head, to be a real honouring of God. And though it be quite another thing that principally moveth and animateth him in all his actions, yet because he hath now and then some such sudden, faint and transient purpose or thought of glorifying God, he is satisfied, without more ado, that he serveth God, and not himself only.

Yea, his holding of a right opinion, or his being orthodox in judgment, (though yet he may have no more cause to believe he is so, but only because he is of the common opinion) is with him a certain token of his being a good and religious man; and this he is ready to call *Faith*, and to confide in it. His very notion of any grace he thinks to be the grace itself; and his understanding the nature and thinking of the work of grace, and his talking confidently, and disputing or contending hotly about it, he supposeth to be the right use and exercise of it. These and very many more ways doth that man deceive himself, that either doth not know, or is not wont often and impartially to examine, himself.

Par. Self-examination is, I perceive, a very necessary, and I doubt, a much neglected exercise; and he that neglecteth it must needs be very ignorant of himself, and therefore very apt to deceive himself in all that he doth. If you have any thing more to say to me at this time, be pleased to go on, for I have no great business to hasten me away this afternoon.

Min. Seeing you are at leisure from your necessary affairs, and seem so desirous of learning the things so nearly concerning your soul, I am very willing to comply with you, and shall now mind you of another thing, whereof I earnestly beg you would take great heed, lest you fall into *Self-deceit*.

Par.

Par. I am desirous to hear it ; and I promise you to consider of it as it deserves, for I would not willingly deceive myself out of the way to heaven.

Min. Let me then warn you in the next place to beware how you rashly entertain any ungrounded and unreasonable *prejudices* and ill opinions against either *things* or *persons*.

Par. What do you mean by *prejudices* against them ?

Min. I mean a worse opinion of any of them than really they deserve, whereby your heart may be set against them without sufficient reason for it, and thereby you may lose the good which you might receive from them. You will not have patience to hear of the *things*, nor to hearken to the *persons* against whom you have beforehand conceived a prejudice, or of which you have got an ill opinion.

Par. I find that too true, both in myself and others ; there are some things which I account so either ridiculous or dangerous, that I have no patience to hear men discourse of them ; and there are some persons that I account either so foolish or so bad, that I have no mind at all to hearken to any advice which they would give me.

Min. And by this means, if your prejudice be not grounded upon sufficient reason, you will rob your soul of much good, and defraud yourself of the best things.

Par. It may well be so ; and to prevent it, afford me your best help, I beseech you.

Min. First then, beware of being prejudiced against those *things* which are most needful to be known and practised. Many are apt to look upon the weightiest matters of the Christian religion as mere *phant'sies*, and foolish conceits, and such as really are not at all.

M

Par.

Par. Which are those weighty matters of the Christian religion that you speak of?

Min. They are such things as belong to the *bidden man of the heart*, as it is called 1 Pet. iii. 4. Such are those *fruits of the spirit* mentioned Gal. v. 22. Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and all spiritual graces, which the natural man cannot have of himself, nor have any real acquaintance with: and what he cannot feel in himself, when he heareth them so much talked of and commended, he is apt to think to be nothing at all; and that the men that talk so much of them are crazed, and cant only as their deluded phant'sies dictate to them. When they hear discourse of that *kingdom of God, which is within men, in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, Rom. xiv. 17. they think of it no otherwise than they do of an *Utopia*, which is no where, or a world in the moon, which no man knoweth any thing of. That joy in the midst of *afflictions*, 1 Thess. i. 6. That *fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ*, 1 Joh. i. 3. And, to be short, *regeneration, the new birth, or being born again of the spirit, the new creature, the partaking of a divine nature, the forming of Christ in us, the transforming and renewing of men in the spirit of their minds, the denying of ourselves, the crucifying of the flesh, the putting off the old man, and the putting on of Christ, the living a life of faith*, and all those most weighty things, wherein the very life and soul of the Christian religion doth consist, they having no experience of them in themselves, conceive hasty *prejudices* against them, as if they were mere fictions, which really are not. They look upon them as sickmens dreams, and idle imaginations of vain and phant'siful *enthusiasts* utterly incredible: or if they be persuaded to think there are such things, they suppose them such as only concern

concern some few of the more perfect sort of Christians, hardly and very rarely attainable by any, and such as a good Christian may safely be without, and altogether ignorant of. Hence they judge those that persuade them to labour after these things to be too busy with them, and to make more ado about such things than is needful.

Par. I have indeed heard some very sober persons talk as if they thought so, and saying, What needs all this stir about the work of grace upon the heart? let us do good, and live honestly, love one another, and say our prayers, and never trouble our heads with these things which no body can understand.

Min. There is also another prejudice that men have against these things; they are apt to look upon them as things which unfit men for common conversation, and would quite mar their trading in the world, and cast them into fits of melancholy, or make them mad, and render their lives uncomfortable to themselves, and uneasy to their company, making them unsociable with the rest of mankind.

Par. So I have heard some say, that it would be impossible for them to live in the world, if they should be such spiritual men as you would have them to be.

Min. That is their ignorance: for nothing would more conduce to the happiness of the world, and the comforts of society, than this truly christian temper. But it is easy for witty wickedness to delude poor men into an ill opinion of what they know not, and what so long as they want, they naturally hate. And besides this, men are the more confirmed in this opinion of inward holiness, by what they have observed in some false pretenders to it, who have made this pretence a

cloke for abundance of abominable villainies, and a colour for disturbing the peace and tranquillity of the world by mischievous schisms and factions, blood-shedding and desolation : and by those imprudences of behaviour which are too often visible even in sincere Christians, who aim at the glory of God, the good of mankind, and their own eternal salvation ; but yet have not learned to govern themselves so discreetly as they should do ; whence evil consequents, such as they least thought of, do often ensue to the disadvantage of the holy religion they profess. Many are naturally of so *sour* and *morose* a temper, that being very imperfectly able to master it, they thereby render their conversation unpleasant ; and for that their religion is evil spoken of : and some are so overgrown with *melancholy*, that for ought that others, such as we now speak of, can perceive, they reap no other benefit by their religion, but continual perplexity of mind, and a life of hourly sorrows, fears and doubts ; and they who can judge of Christianity by nothing else but the effects and fruits of it which they see in men, are ready to think it little worth, that makes the professors of it no happier. Nay, they are forward enough to impute all their personal miscarriages to the principles of their *religion*, as if it were the cause of those very things which it pretends to root out or rectify. Hence unregenerate men are not willing to see that there are any such things in *Christianity*, as we mentioned but now, nor to believe it signifies any thing at all more than an outward *profession* : nay, they seem scared at the very thoughts of all this inward purity, and as some children and *melancholicks* in the dark are afraid of their own *phant'sies*, and all their care is to cover their faces and eyes, that they may see nothing, and to stop their ears, that they may hear nothing, and then

then they think themselves safe enough : so these poor self-deluding sinners think, whilst they can keep off their eyes from such good *books* as are intended for their better information in these things, and do not go to hear such *Ministers* as are most faithful to their souls, in dealing plainly with them, they are safe enough, they need not fear running mad through too much *religion*, more than through too much *learning* ; whilst, alas ! their present madness is the cause of these vain thoughts within them.

Par. You have shewn me how men are apt to deceive themselves through their very unreasonable *prejudices* at the main *things* of the *Christian religion*, and never come to discern the things that belong unto their everlasting peace, because they have entertained a foolish conceit beforehand, that the knowledge of them will only involve them in endless troubles, and inextricable perplexities of mind ; and they are afraid of nothing more (as I remember you told me before) than of disquieting their consciences, or their carnal security with thoughts of that which alone can bring them a sure and lasting peace of conscience. Will you now proceed to those *prejudices* against the *persons* of men, whereof you said it is needful for us to take heed ?

Min. The *persons* which make profession of the Christian religion, are of divers sorts and sizes : some strive to live up to their holy profession, and exemplify their faith in their lives ; others content themselves with a naked profession and formality of religion ; some are *sincere*, and some are *hypocrites*. Among the *sincere*, some are *strong*, and some are *weak* ; some are *learned*, and some are *ignorant* ; some are more, and some less *discreet* in their behaviour. And there are hardly any of any sort against whom some or other are not

strongly prejudiced ; and again, hardly any, of whom some or other have not too high an opinion, which helps to heighten their prejudice against others. Now, as we are inclined to follow some only, because we have got a good opinion, it is no matter how, of their learning, prudence and piety, and in confidence of these run blindly after them in all their most pernicious errors : so for the ill opinion we have been brought to have of others, though upon very slender, or it may be no grounds (for whether it be deservedly or undeservedly, is here seldom well considered) we are apt to suspect every thing that they hold for a truth, to be false ; and seem afraid even of the virtues which we see them either practise, or make any shew of practising. Upon this account, as many take up with a *half-religion*, because they do not perceive that they, whose persons they have in admiration, do pretend to any more : so many are apt to think all that is more than such a *half-religion*, to be more than needs, and nothing else but *hypocrisy* ; because they find it so earnestly contended for by such whom they have been accustomed to call hypocrites. So subject are men to deceive themselves out of all true religion, by regarding more what men say or do, whom they have learned to love or hate, honour or despise, than what *Jesus Christ* hath taught us both by his life and doctrine.

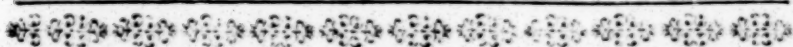
Par. Indeed, I have known some myself, that are so taken with some men, that they take all for Gospel that they tell them, tho' they have never examined it, nor indeed do understand it. And others they are so bitterly bent against, that they will not believe the Gospel itself, when they preach it ; nay, I question whether they would any longer endure their own teachers, if these should commend them.

Min.

Min. It is certainly a thing too notorious, and not sufficiently lamented, that this very prejudice of men against all that are not of the party or faction which themselves have espoused; and on the other side their unreasonably high opinion of all, how otherwise obnoxious soever, that go along with them in the same way or sect, is one main thing which keeps open so many wide breaches in the church, as so many gaping wounds in the body, thro' which the life of Christianity seems every day more and more to expire: for whilst every party endeavours to adorn and set itself off to the love and admiration of men, by spoiling the other, and robbing it as much as is possible, in the estimation of men, of all goodness; all parties joining in nothing else almost, but in this one resolution of accounting charity the common enemy; it is a very lamentable sight to see, how by thus excluding charity, which is the bond of perfectness, they strip themselves of the livery of *Christ*, and glory of *Christianity*, and confine the church of Christians, tho' it may be they consider it not, to the narrow compass of those few, who had rather, for the love they bear to Christ, and the souls of men, and the peace of Christendom, that the sheep might all be of one flock and one fold, tho' of divers colours, than be made a prey to the wolf, by being divided and squandered into small parcels; whilst by a mutual affrightment at, or hatred of each others colour; they either fly from or drive forth each other out of the fold; and so by little and little make a shift to forget their natural innocence, and learn to play the wolves themselves, preying upon one another.


Par. Here you speak a sad truth, enough to make every good christian's heart to ache. We have herein had sad experience what prejudice is able to do.

Min. Go home then, and pray heartily that God would remove all such prejudices far from you, and that *laying aside all malice and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, you may as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,* 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2. And when we have another fit opportunity, we will discourse more of these things.



S E C T. X.

*Other ways of SELF-DECEIT
discovered.*

Par.  ITH your leave, Sir, if you be at leisure to spend any time with me this evening, I beg the favour of you to point out unto me some more of those unlucky arts which we have got to deceive ourselves.

Min. You are welcome, and I am at leisure to do as you desire. And the next way whereby we are wont to deceive ourselves, which now comes into my mind, is an undue *comparing* of ourselves with other men, a thing which is certainly as pernicious to ourselves, as it is odious to others.

Par. It is usually said indeed, that *comparisons are odious*; and no wonder, for we do all incline to a good conceit of ourselves, and therefore love not to hear others say, that they are as good or better than we: but how this is so hurtful to ourselves, I do not yet understand.

Min.

Min. If we would compare ourselves with others as we ought, it might do us good, and no hurt ; but this we are not very forward to do.

Par. I beg of you therefore to shew me our error in this particular.

Min. You cannot but know that we are all of us naturally desirous to be well thought on, and to seem full as good as we are to others. And it is as true, that we would fain think the best of ourselves, and are not easily brought to have an ill (though it be a true) opinion of ourselves. Hence (as I told you formerly) we are as unwilling to know ourselves perfectly, as we are that others should know the worst of us ; and because we are loth to understand our own deformities and defects, lest we should think worse of ourselves for them, we very seldom compare ourselves with those who are evidently much above us in all goodness, to the end that we may see how far we come short of the full stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. A dwarf is unwilling to stand by the side of a very tall man, because he knows that he can thereby get nothing but disadvantage to himself, and appear rather lower than higher. Hence it is too usual with us, to seek out such as may serve for foils to set ourselves off by with all the advantages that may be : and we are wont to compare ourselves only with those whose blemishes we are sure are as many, and obvious, as they are odious to God and man, that so finding in ourselves *something* at least of the much goodness which they want, and less of that evil which visibly appeareth in them, we may comfort ourselves with these thoughts, that we are not the worst of men, but there is somebody worse than we.

Par. Is it not a just ground of comfort, to see that I am not so wicked as many of my neighbours

bours are? And ought I not to rejoyce herein, that I am not guilty of those sins whereof I see others guilty? I am sure it seems so to me, and I find it comforts me much, when, seeing how wickedly some of my neighbours live, I find that I do not run into such extravagancies as they daily do.

Min. You are bound to bless God indeed, for his undeserved goodness to you, in keeping you from any sin whatsoever, whereof you see others guilty; and you are to rejoyce, that you are not guilty of it: but you ought withal to be very cautious how you comfort yourself, notwithstanding this, with thoughts that you are better than the very worst of your neighbours. For *first*, you may possibly be mistaken in your judgment; and *next*, you may hereupon fall into pride; and *lastly*, such comfort may tend to your ruin; which I could shew you very plainly; had we not other things in hand, which will not suffer me to inlarge upon these.

Par. Yet seeing you are now shewing how we may be deceived by *comparing* ourselves with others, which is a thing that we are very ready to do, I have a great desire to be well instructed herein, and beg you would, though it be very briefly, satisfy me a little better in what you last said. And *first*, how you think I may be mistaken in my judgment, when I think myself better than the worst of my neighbours.

Min. Thus, in short: you see the worst of your neighbours, but, it may be, you do not see their best; and you see the best of your self, and, it may be, you do not see the worst: yea, you are, it may be, forward enough to put the worst construction on all that you see in your neighbours, and the best on all that you see in yourself. Again, you know not what helps and encourage-

ments

ments you have had to do good, which your neighbour wants; or how many and strong temptations to evil he lieth under, which you are free from: to say no more, you know not, it may be, whether he sin against the convictions of his own heart, as, perhaps, you do; nor whether he be not ready, upon the first conviction of the evil of his ways, to forsake them, when you have, it may be, a long time persisted in your sin, notwithstanding such convictions.

Par. I confess, my ignorance of these things may make me judge amiss, and therefore it must needs be safest for me to judge as favourably as I can of other men, and impartially of myself. The *second* thing you said, that I may grow proud hereby, I can easily see.

Min. And you may as easily know, that *pride* in your own goodness will spoil all that ever you do, be it never so good, and puts you into a worse condition than, it may be, the worst of your neighbours are in; for *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble*, 1 Pet. v. 5. And having told you this, I need not tell you how the comfort you take in being better than others may tend to your ruin.

Par. If we grow proud of ourselves, we need no more to ruin us.

Min. And besides that, he that comforts himself in a conceit of his present goodness, is apt to rest in it, and take no great care how he may grow better; and so the publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of God before him.

Par. I see it is safest for us to measure our goodness by the rules of it given us in the *word* of God, and not by what we see in other men.

Min. It is very true, and yet, alas! how many of us would be at an utter loss for any good thing to commend ourselves for, were it not for this deceitful

deceitful shift of getting into the midst of a flock of *pygmies*, to render our height observable. It will concern us all to consider, that a man may be, in many respects, better than a great many, yea, than the most of those whom he is acquainted with, and yet be very far from being truly good. It was not the *pharisee's* being better than others, who were *extortioners*, *unjust*, *adulterers*, or *publicans*, that could justify him to be a good man, suppose he really were as much better than they, as he thought himself, *Luke* xviii. 11. A man may be none of the worst men, and yet be too bad by much to be a Christian. All that is not *very black*, is not therefore *white*. A little more strength than a little child hath, will not make you a strong man. A little more wit than a very fool hath, will not make a wise man. A little less vice than a very wicked man hath, will not make you a virtuous man: And yet we are apt to get into a very good conceit of ourselves, even by this slender advantage of not being altogether so bad as the very worst are. As if it were enough to make us like angels, that we are not quite as black as devils. Thus it certainly is, whilst we use to measure ourselves by example, or by any other measure, but that of the sanctuary, the true Gospel standard; we will be always ready enough to deceive ourselves, and think ourselves to be something, when we are yet even nothing of what we should be. It will not follow, that I am no *beast*, because I am not a *dog*, or a *swine*; or that I am not *unclean*, because I am not a *collier*. The broad way which leadeth to destruction, hath in it a great variety of paths to walk in, and a man needs not walk in them *all*, no nor in the *foulest*, or *nearest* way to hell, and yet be never out of the way thither: He may go before, or come behind other men, or walk in a path which but few others walk in,

in, and yet never come into the narrow way that leads to life any more than they do. There are more ways than a few for a man to kill himself; he needs not choose the most ignominious of them, and yet be as sure to die; he may die in a duel, which pusillanimity hath taught men to account gallant and honourable, as well as by cutting his own throat, which is now rightly accounted reproachful, though once it was accounted, by men altogether as wise as they, that now challenge to themselves alone the right of judging what is base or honourable, as great a piece of gallantry as the other. As there is a very great variety of damning vices, so is there also a great latitude in vitiousness, and one wicked man may much differ from another, and exceed him in many degrees of wickedness, and yet the other come as surely to destruction, though, it may be, he may not sink so deep into hell, as he that carrieth more of the weight of sin about him. There may be a bad and a worse among wicked men; but there is never a good one. It is no matter how fat and fair the goat be, nor how much more worth he is than the rest of the flock, so long as he is a goat, and not a sheep, he shall, by the righteous judge of quick and dead, be set upon the left hand, and sentenced to everlasting torments, *Matt. xxv. 33, 46.*

Par. You have said enough to convince me of the unreasonableness and danger of comparing ourselves with those whom we suppose worse than ourselves. Have we yet any more ways of deceiving ourselves?

Min. Yes, so many, that I cannot hope to mind you of one half of them. But that which I shall next warn you to take heed of, is this, *See that you judge not of yourself by the good opinion which other*
men

men may have of you, for in so doing, you are very likely to fall into Self-deceit.

Par. I should think there can be no great danger of that in the age wherein we live. I do not find that we are very forward to be too charitable in our thoughts of one another. I can come into very little company, but most of the talk is of other mens *faults* and *infirmities*; and if some have the good fortune to get a good word of one or two, the rest have commonly something to say against him, to lessen his reputation. It's a rare thing to hear one as well spoken of as he deserves, and therefore no great danger can any man be in of growing into too good an opinion of himself, by knowing what others say of him.

Min. It is indeed, as you say, too common a thing amongst all sorts of people (such a stranger is Christian love and charity among reputed Christians) to aggravate the faults, and extenuate the virtues of others. But yet there is no scarcity of flatterers in the world, and even of these that are so busy with the faults or virtues of others, there are not a few that will commend you to your face, or to your friend, whom they hope to please by it, or by whom they hope it may be brought to your ear. And there are some good men and women in the world, though few in comparison of the rest, who can heartily rejoyce in the good which they see or hear of in any one, and through the greatness of their charity, are easy to be abused into a better opinion of others than they really deserve; so that if you have any shew of goodness in you, whereby others may be deceived of you, there is danger of your deceiving yourself, by valuing too much their charitable thoughts of you: and especially in these days, when (I will not say goodness, but) even the shew and appearance

pearance of goodness is so rare, both others, that would fain have you good, are apter to be deceived by any little shadow of it they can discern in you, and you will be the easilier deceived by their good opinion of you, because this kind of charity is so rare also.

Par. Possibly there may be some danger of it; I desire you therefore not to hide it from me, whatever it be.

Min. Self-love, you know, is too busy in us all, and is ever lying at the catch, ready to lay hold on any handle that shews itself of advancing us in our own esteem above our just height; and therefore, whosoever they be, that either are so kind and charitable, or so crafty and fawning, as to manifest or pretend a favourable opinion of us, we are ready enough to flatter ourselves with a fond belief that they judge impartially and righteously, and give us no more than our due. Of what sort soever the men be that commend us, we know how to turn their commendations to our own advantage, and make as much of it as we would have.

Par. I know not what advantage a man can make of the commendation of wicked men, whose very breath is so strong, as to leave an ill favour on every thing 'tis blown upon.

Min. Though they be of the worst sort of men, whose good word a good man dreads more than he doth the bad word of others, yet are we ready to take occasion thereby to think too well of ourselves; for we persuade ourselves, that there must needs be some great good more than ordinary visible in us, that is able to wrest and force from such men a commendation, so much against their inclinations, that they dare not deny it only because it is visible to all, otherwise they, who are not willing to commend any, would not commend

us; and that, could they hope to be believed in discommending us, they would not commend that in us which they cannot love: Nay, though they should dispraise us, yet we are forward enough to make this use of it, that there is in us certainly something praise-worthy, which because they envy our due praises, they thus labour to hide from the eyes of others. If we find that we have the reputation of good men among the better sort, we value their judgment the more, because they are good, and experimentally know the worth of goodness where-ever they see it. And we are yet the more confirmed in a good opinion of ourselves, by the commendations they are wont to give us, because we suppose them to be men of sincerity, and such as account it a sin, and for that are unwilling to flatter us.

Par. All this is, I fear, too true. We know that most men are not very much inclined to bestow upon others their due commendations, and that because the most are themselves bad enough, and for that are not at all desirous that any one should be thought good. And hence we have learned to fetch an argument to deceive ourselves withal, concluding that our virtues are excellent and conspicuous to all the world, because that they, whom we know to be of all men most unwilling to see them, cannot for very shame but own them.

Min. You see then, that whilst we seek ourselves out of ourselves, and go abroad to inquire of others what we are, seeking for honour one of another, and regarding the praise of men, that cannot know us, more than the praise of God, and testimony of our own consciences, to which alone we can be known, we run headlong into Self-deceit. We study now night and day to put on such an out-side, as may impose upon men
that

that can see no farther, and are bound in charity to judge the best of what they see, and to hope, that what they cannot see, is suitable to it. Thus we labour to deceive others, that they may deceive us, having little or no regard to the inner man, to approve ourselves to the Searcher of hearts. In other things, which we all grant to be of far less moment, we are not thus wont to judge of ourselves by the opinions which other men have of us, but account it a great piece of folly, or rather madness, so to do.

Par. In what things do you mean?

Min. I mean in our worldly and bodily concerns. We would most of us more gladly be rich, than others would rejoyce to see us so, and yet, when we are poor, we will not be persuaded to think ourselves rich, because others think, or say, that we are so. If we feel ourselves lame, or sick, it is not other mens thinking, or saying, that we are well and sound, that can persuade us to believe that we are so, not though they be the ablest physicians or chirurgeons in the world that tell us so. And yet we cannot but confess, that men are much better able to judge aright of our worldly and bodily, than of our spiritual state. They are not able to judge of the sincerity of our hearts; they can see no farther than the outward man, and are bound to judge charitably, and the judgment of charity is not always according to truth, but according to outward appearances only, which may deceive the wisest of men: but it greatly becometh every man to judge of himself according to truth, and by what he inwardly feels in himself, and not by that which can appear unto other men.

Par. We had need to do so; for God will judge us according to what we have, and not according to what we seem to be.

Min. I will add but a word or two more upon this subject, and then we will speak of something else. You must know then, that it will concern you, not only to see that you be not brought to have too good an opinion of yourself by what others think of you, but also, that by the bad opinion men have of you, you be not brought to think the worse of any thing that is good in yourself. You must remember, that it is the wicked humour of most men, by all means, to labour to bring into discredit among men that which they do not love, and will not own the practice of any virtue to be commendable in others, which they themselves would not be tyed to practise; and if they can once perceive you inclined to be swayed by the opinion of men, they will hope very easily to shame you out of all goodness. Some will call your moderation and peaceable temper, by the name of lukewarmness, and a temporizing humour; and others will call your care to do your duty in an acceptable manner to God and man, and your necessary care of your soul, by the name of preciseness; and your very temperance and civility in your abstaining from riot and excess, shall be accounted unfociableness and moroseness of humour, and I know not what. Take heed therefore you mind not too much the sayings or opinions of men about these things, lest you, by little and little, grow out of love with your duty.

Par. The caution you give me is very needful and seasonable, at this day especially, when it is become the very study and business of such as are accounted the wits of this age, to bring seriousness into disgrace, to ridicule piety, and laugh religion out of countenance.

Min. Seeing you seem well satisfied thus far, I will now go forward, and point out to you another

ther of those ways, whereby we are apt to deceive ourselves.

Par. I pray let me hear it.

Min. It is this : *We are apt to over-rate and set too great a price upon some outward acts of religion, wherein we are most frequent, and use to exercise them with some delight.*

Par. But wherein lies the deceit of this?

Min. We are apt to think, that doing this we do all, because we consider not what is required of us more than this. Some particular things there are belonging to the Christian religion, which finding in ourselves, and that we can, and do practise them with ease and delight, we conclude ourselves become perfect masters of them ; and we set such store by them, that by them only we measure and judge of our Christianity.

Par. Be pleased to make me understand this a little better.

Min. I will endeavour it in a few instances. Some men, you know, are by nature disposed to courtesy, civility, and affability ; they are of a winning and obliging humour, and very lowly and pleasant in their behaviour towards all men, even the meanest of those with whom they at any time converse : and more than so, are very modest in the thoughts they have of themselves, thinking but very meanly of their own parts, abilities, and performances, and in all things preferring others before themselves willingly hearing the praises of others, but impatient of hearing their own ; and such men as these seem, both to themselves and others, to be very humble men.

Par. And well they may ; for men of this temper are not every where to be met withal in this proud age. Is not this a truly Christian temper?

Min. If nothing else, the rarity of such persons would persuade us they are Christians. But tho'

this be such a temper as Christianity requireth in men, yet should they, who are so happy as to have it, take heed how they value it too highly in themselves, and merely, for this, think, that the blessedness of the *poor in spirit*, and of the *meek*, belongeth unto them. Seeing there is much more than this required to make a Christian; though this be found in too few, that go currently now a-days under that name.

Again, others are naturally of a very peaceable mind, they love no quarrelling or brawling, no wrangling or disputing, but they strive all they can for quietness, both at home in their families, and abroad among their neighbours; they labour and pray for peace and concord, both in church and kingdom, and shew themselves so, by putting up affronts, and bearing injuries, and being very active, at their own trouble and charge, to make peace, and reconcile enemies.

Par. There may be some such men as these in the world, but very few of them are of my acquaintance. I speak not only of us poor Laymen, but I have in my time been acquainted with some of you Clergymen, who should shew us the way to heaven; and I cannot name among them all a man of this heavenly temper; for certainly such it must be, so hardly is it to be found in earth.

Min. It is indeed that temper, which Christianity should teach us all, and especially us of the *Clergy*, who, above all, ought to shew forth that *wisdom which is from above*, and is *first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, &c.* Jam. iii. 17. And I hope, though you have not been acquainted with them, there are some such, both Clergy and Lay. Yet, whoever is of this temper, must see also, that he be in other things a Christian, as well as in this,
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or he cannot challenge the blessing of the peacemaker.

Others are very continent and abstemious, and use much fasting, and chastising of the body, and do not indulge it in food, or apparel, or laziness, or sleep, or in any of those things which the voluptuous part of mankind are most in love with ; but if hereupon, without any farther inquiry into what they have, or what they want, they conclude themselves truly mortified Christians, and such as have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts, they are too hasty, and overvalue that which they have.

In like manner, some are naturally very tender-hearted, and very pitiful, merciful and liberal, give alms abundantly to the poor and needy, and remit debts to persons disabled by poverty, and are not worldly-minded, covetous, or rigid in exacting all their own rights: yet if for this only they shall account themselves charitable Christians, they will be found to be out in their reckoning, and to overvalue what they have.

Par. You will persuade me by and by, I fear, that no man shall ever be able to say, that he is a Christian ; for, as far as I can see, you will not allow us to account ourselves Christians for the best things that we can find, or hope to find, in ourselves.

Min. You are mistaken, as you will perceive, by what now I am about to tell you. Here lies our deceit ; we do usually so stedfastly fix our thoughts upon such things as these, whenever we find any of them in us, and magnify ourselves so much upon the account of them, that we overlook all our numerous defects and failings in other as necessary branches of Christianity : and we are so quickly possessed with an opinion of our good condition, and of the truth of our Christianity,

stianity, that we give ourselves no time to consider whence these things in us arise, which we do so admire in ourselves, whether from our natural temper, or from sanctifying grace. And, by a double mistake, *first*, of some small part of Christianity for the whole; and *secondly*, of that which is not the cause, for the cause, we deceive ourselves into a good conceit of our own goodness.

Par. I now, in some measure, understand you.

Min. Let me advise you then to be as wise for yourselves in these spiritual concerns, as you are in other things, and I hope all will be well with you.

Par. How is that?

Min. In your earthly things you consider not only what you have, but what you want also; and indeed, because you think that you can never have too much or enough of this world, you dwell in your thoughts so much on what you want, that you cannot be truly thankful for what you have. But now in spiritual things it is quite otherwise; and whereas you should consider as well what you want as what you have, you are so quickly satisfied, and please yourselves so much with what you have (at least as you think) already, that you never inquire what is yet wanting, to make up and complete your Christianity, and this is that you should do.

Par. What is the reason that we should consider so much what we want?

Min. The reason is very clear, when you have learned, as is needful for you to do, that eternal happiness is by Christ intailed not upon any one, or some few particular branches of the Christian religion, but on Christianity as it is intirely practised in all its parts: so that when you read in the Scripture a promise of life or blessedness made to this or that grace or virtue, the promise is to
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be understood as made unto it, not as one particular grace apart from others, but as implying the whole of Christianity, which is such, as it cannot subsist if any one essential part of it be taken away : therefore, whenever we find a promise of blessedness to repentance, or faith, to the love or the fear of God, or obedience to the Gospel of Christ, or to any other branch of the Christian duty or religion, we are to understand it made to that particular, as in conjunction with all the rest, they being all, in the truth and life of them, inseparable one from another. He is no true penitent, that is not a true believer ; he is no true believer, that is no true lover of God ; he is no true lover of God, that doth not truly fear God ; he doth not truly fear God, that obeyeth not the Gospel of Christ ; and so on through the whole chain of Christian virtues : he that is not a Christian in them all, is not a Christian in any one of them ; *He that offendeth in one point is guilty of all,* Jam. ii. 20. No act is any part of Christianity, if it come not from true grace in the heart ; and whensoever true grace is in the heart, it disposeth a man to an universal goodness.

Par. You have now fully cleared these things to my understanding : I resolve now, with your leave, to exercise my meditations upon them, till some more convenient opportunity.



S E C T. XI.

More ways of SELF-DECEIT discovered.

Min.  OME, neighbour, shall we now go on to see what other ways men have of deceiving themselves, besides those whereof we have already taken notice?

Par. If you please, I think we cannot spend our time more profitably; for it will be hard for us to escape this rock in our way to heaven, if we know not well where it lieth; but it will be easy for us to avoid the way to ruin when we know it well: and by what you have already discovered unto me, I still more and more discern the necessity of a skilful guide; for our great danger, I find, lieth in this, that these ways of Self-deceit are so like the ways of truth and life, that they are easily mistaken the one for the other.

Min. I am glad you understand that; I have the more hopes that my pains will be well bestowed upon you, when you seem convinced of the necessity of instruction.

Par. What, I beseech you, is the next thing that you think good to instruct me in?

Min. The next way of Self-deceit that I now think upon, is *mens setting too great a rate on their conformity and obedience to the laws of the nation or kingdom wherein they live, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil.*

Par.

Par. Such conformity and obedience is certainly an indispensable christian duty ; are we not commanded by God to obey the laws of our superiors both in church and state ?

Min. We are commanded more than once to do so ; and without all dispute, it is, as you say, an indispensable christian duty : the greater is our concern to understand it well, that we may do it as we ought.

Par. We must indeed understand our duty before we can do it ; and it is easy to understand this duty, for what is it else but to do as we are by law commanded ?

Min. It is our duty to do as by law we are commanded, if no law of God forbid what that law of man commandeth : but if what the law of man commandeth be forbidden by the law of God, we are not to do it, but in obedience to God, rather suffer with all patience for not doing what men command.

Par. That is a hard lesson ; for such a thing may fall out, that our governors may command us what God hath forbidden, and then are we in this great strait, that we must either do as our governors command, and sin against God, or by not doing it, sin against our governors, and be punished for it too.

Min. We must not account any thing hard which God hath declared to be his will, and acceptable to him, and will indeed, if we behave ourselves religiously therein, increase our future reward : and such is our suffering patiently at the hands of our governors for our obedience to God. Our blessed Saviour hath commanded us to *rejoice and be exceeding glad, when we are persecuted for righteousness sake, because great is our reward in heaven,* Matt. v. 10, 12. And St. Peter tells us, that *if we suffer for righteousness sake, we are happy,* 1 Pet. iii.

14. And again, *that if any man suffer as a christian, he ought not to be ashamed, but glorify God on this behalf*, 1 Pet. iv. 16. And that *this is thankful, and acceptable with God, if when we do well, we suffer for it, and take it patiently, for conscience towards God enduring grief, and suffering wrongfully*, 1 Pet. ii. 19, 20.

Par. But some have taught us a far easier way, telling us, that such as we have no more to do, but to understand the will of our governors, and to do it; never enquiring how it consists with the will of God, but presuming, that whatever they command, is God's will, and that they are the interpreters of God's will to us, and in obeying them we obey God.

Min. Such men teach you a way which they are willing to chuse for their own ease, and to avoid suffering, and such false teachers there were in the apostles days, which gave occasion to those better instructions which they have plentifully given us, to *obey God rather than men*, Acts v. 29. and to suffer from men rather than disobey God.

Par. But will not this doctrine set open a gap for rebellion, and disobedience, and disorder?

Min. Men may abuse this doctrine to such ill purposes, as wicked men do the whole word of God, and their christian liberty, *using it for a cloke of maliciousness*, 1 Pet. ii. 16. But the doctrine itself hath no such effects. The will of God, which makes our christian duty in order to salvation, is plain enough before our eyes in his word; and it is easy to see whether the commands of our governors consist with it or no. And here it is that we must do the will of God, whatever our governors command to the contrary; and not to do so, is only to incur eternal damnation for fear of temporal suffering. But many things there be which God hath not (plainly at least) either commanded
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or forbidden; and here, if we be satisfied they are so left by God, the case is plain we are to do in things of this nature as the laws of our governors command us: and if there be some disputes about them whether they be such or no, God's express command to obey our governors in all things lawful, must needs mightily incline every conscientious man, to submit to their determination. But I must not now trouble you with mens disputes about this matter; the thing I intend is this, that you may not deceive yourself into too good thoughts of yourself for your obedience to mens laws.

Par. How may that be done?

Min. By thinking that you do all that becomes you as a Christian, if you totally subject yourself to the higher powers on earth, concluding you are truly *religious*, because you think yourself *loyal*; and because you find in yourself not only a great willingness to obey the commands of those in authority, but also a burning zeal against all those that violate their authority by breaking their commands.

Par. In my mind, they who are so zealous for the magistrate's authority, and against the impugners of it, do very well.

Min. It is very true, that they do well in something, that is, in their earnest desire, and utmost endeavour to keep up the authority of so beneficial an ordinance of God, as *magistracy* most certainly is, without which all things would presently run into confusion; and there is little doubt to be made of it, but *atheism* lies at the root of *rebellion*, and would be found to follow *anarchy* close at the heels. Then only men shall have something to say in defence of rebellion and disloyalty, when they can shew that God doth not govern the world, nor hath given unto men laws to live by,
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or in those laws hath made no mention of either obeying or resisting the higher powers, or hath not owned those powers to be of his own institution and appointment. And then only may men plead the no need of such governors, when they have found a way to make all men very good, and every man wise enough to govern himself.

Par. I am yet at a loss to think how we deceive ourselves in this matter.

Min. When you think so well of yourself for your obedience and loyalty, that you regard not whether you have that in you, which only can bring in Loyalty within the compass of Religion or Christianity.

Par. What can that be ?

Min. The fear of God : *Fear God, and honour the king*, 1 Pet. ii. 17. As it is plain that no man fears God, that doth not honour the king : so I am bold to say it, that no man religiously honours the king, nor can be truly loyal, that doth not fear God. See then, that all your obedience and zeal against disobedience arise from this right principle in you, that it be an effect of sincere religion, and *for the Lord's sake*, 1 Pet. ii. 13. *And for conscience sake*, Rom. xiii. 5. Let the reason which mainly moves you to obey the powers, be this, that *the powers that be are of God*, v. 1. If our obedience to God be not the root of our obedience to all human government, this obedience will soon wither and die ; nor can we be the better Christians, for doing that which we do not as any part of Christianity. Neither are we to be esteemed loyal subjects, notwithstanding our present obedience, if it be not purely for conscience sake towards God that we are obedient ; for what assurance can we give our governors, that we will be any longer good subjects, than it may stand with our worldly interests so to be, if we be not
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so in respect of God's command? What can our oath of fidelity and allegiance signify, if we fear not God? Nay, seeing the laws of God are become a part of the laws of the kingdom, and our *kings* are the *defenders of the faith*, is not he necessarily a disobedient rebellious person to his *king*, whosoever lives not in obedience to the laws of God? such a silly contradiction is it for a man that lives not a godly life, to call himself a good and loyal subject.

Par. This is indeed plain *english*, and a clear truth, but little considered by many, who live very unlike Christians, and yet would be very angry, should they hear you or any man else say they are not good subjects.

Min. I say not, that they do not yet behave themselves dutifully to their king in all things but in religion: but this is certain, let them make what they can of it, the king can have no assurance of such mens allegiance any longer than it shall stand with their worldly interests.

Par. I see not how he can.

Min. But to speak more closely to the matter in hand. If we think our complying with the laws of men, who are our lawful superiors, of what sort soever, to be either the whole, or the principal part of our religion, as I fear many do, we shrewdly deceive ourselves. All human government is subordinate to divine, even as all men are unto God. And the ends of human government are, the securing to God his honour of supreme governor among men, and the preserving men in peace and good order under the government of God; as is plain enough from *St. Paul's* words, *1 Tim. ii. 2.* where he exhorts to pray for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. The ends of government are godliness and honesty

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in *peace* and *quietness*. The utmost extent of human laws, as human, is only to the outward man, for this alone can come under the inspection of human governors. He therefore that thinks all religion lies in obedience to human laws, exempts the heart from all religion and government, save only a care to keep the outward man in a due decorum. And he that makes the same obedience the main part of religion, sets the feet above the head, and the means above the end.

Par. Have you any more to add upon this point?

Min. No, I think this enough, if you will carefully remember it. I will therefore mind you of something else of no less concernment to be learnt, especially in these days, when the church of God is so rent by schisms and factions, that a man can hardly tell whether men think there be any such thing as they say in their creed that they believe, *one holy catholic church*.

Par. It is, God knows, a lamentable sight to behold the divisions that are among Christians. But what is it that you think so seasonable upon this consideration to be observed?

Min. You cannot but know that many among us pretend to have a great zeal for religion.

Par. Yea, never were pretences to zeal for religion higher, than at this time, and yet never more apparent coldness in the sincere practice of serious religion.

Min. And doth not this zeal for religion, so much pretended, whilst the pretenders are so cold in the practice of it, plainly shew, that they take themselves to be truly religious, merely upon the account of this zeal?

Par. It seems indeed, to shew no less, for why should they seem zealous for religion, if they think there be no such thing? And why should they
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they not practise the duties of religion as zealously as they contend about them, did they not take that zeal for a certain sign of a religious man?

Min. You can easily also observe, how this zeal doth mostly shew itself, either by talking much against the more common and reigning sins of the present age wherein we live; or by being earnest for some one party or sect of men against another, or for some little usages and observances in religious worship against others.

Par. This is very obvious; I expect now what use you will make of it.

Min. The religion of some men seems wholly to consist in a railing faculty, and their zeal to spend itself in an often, earnest, and loud declaiming against the wickedness of the present age. And for this alone they would have themselves thought to be very religious men. How else should they be so much concerned for the sins of the world, that they are not able with any patience to behold them, especially such as they term the reigning vices of the times, but they find themselves presently all inflamed with hot indignation against them; and the fire thus kindled, groweth so hot and violent within them, that they can find no ease in their hearts, till they speak with their tongues?

Par. Is it not very good to be zealously bent against sin?

Min. It is indeed, if it be a right christian zeal; for then it begins at home, and first purifieth a man's own heart. But, alas! they who pretend to all this zeal against sin, have perhaps no true zeal at all. But they mistake a heat of another nature for christian zeal, which is indeed the very height of love to God and holiness, an ardent desire that his name may be glorified by holiness; and thereupon a pious indignation against every thing

thing that is dishonourable to him. If mens zeal be all this, it is well ; for then it is accompanied with all christian graces in them that have it. But men may be warm against some vices which suit not with their own natural tempers, or that stand in their way to their own worldly ends, or out of an hatred or envy which they bear against the persons upon some other account in whom they see these sins, and may think this a true zeal, and account themselves good Christians for it, and so be deceived.

Again, men that are engaged in any sect or party, are often very zealous for the reputation of their own society or faction, and as violently bent to bring into disrepute all others ; and this they are apt to miscall Christian zeal, and to overvalue themselves for it. Very good Christians they suppose they must needs be, who have such a zeal for good men, though, it may be, the best argument they have to prove them good men, is only this, that they are of their own humour. Now christian zeal is all for uniting, this is for dividing ; that calls in fervent prayer for fire from heaven into mens hearts to melt and soften, make gentle and compliant ; this in rage is calling for fire from heaven upon mens heads to consume.

Some again, because they are earnest either in defending or opposing some small rites, ceremonies, or customs in fashion about religious worship, are well pleased with themselves on this account only, though the power of godliness be little discernable in their lives. But shall not they be thought very religious persons, who are so zealous for the religion that they profess, that they cannot endure that one single hair of her head be touched, or that the least fringe, lace or pin about her dress and attire should be misplaced or disordered? And are not they on the other side men
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of great godliness and purity, who are so jealous for the honour and purity of religion, that they will not endure any thing of ornament or ceremony to come near her, lest it should defile ; nothing of human invention to step within the doors of her house, for fear of prophanation ? Such zeal as this, some men think cannot choose but be very commendable, and therefore they that have it in so high a degree, must be Christians of no mean rate.

Now men consider not as they ought, that tho' it *be good to be zealously affected always in a good matter*, Gal. iv. 18. yet before they can justly assume to themselves the title of good Christians, because of their zeal, they must first be well satisfied that the matter about which they are so zealous, be really very good. It is good indeed to be pure, but withal it is good to be peaceable ; and he that is indued with divine wisdom, is both, and knows, that to think himself either the one or the other, without being both, is but to dream. It is best, as I said but now, to set our *zeal on work* first at home, to burn up and consume all our dross, that we ourselves may be vessels purified for the Master's use ; and thence let it proceed forth regularly under the conduct of *wisdom, humility, and charity*, to the *purging* and purifying, not the *consuming* or destroying of others ; much less either to the burning down all the houses of God in the land, or firing the true children of God out of their Father's house, where they should feed in peace on the bread of life. Zeal is a very mad, headstrong and unruly thing, if it be not governed by sound knowledge and prudence, having much heat, but little light ; and it is a very devouring thing, if it be not commanded and restrained by charity, burning up where it should but warm and cherish.

Par. There is much truth in what you have now said ; our own experience is ready to witness it with you.

Min. It is well you see it. I will now tell you something which is of more general concernment, a way which, I fear, most of us take to deceive ourselves, and yet perceive it not.

Par. Let me hear that, I pray you.

Min. It is a foolish confidence of long life, and more time.

Par. I do not remember that I have been at any time very confident that I should live long.

Min. But have you frequently thought of dying soon ? Or have you not many nights gone to bed not considering how uncertain it was, whether or no you should live till morning ?

Par. I am afraid few of us can deny that we have done so.

Min. This is all that I mean, we are not so mindful of dying as we should be ; and though we can have no reason to be confident we shall live long, yet we go on from day to day, presuming we may yet live longer.

Par. We do so ; and how doth this tend to Self-deceit ?

Min. Passing our days in this presumption, and supposing we may yet have time enough before we die to finish our course, we are apt to put off all for the present, contenting ourselves with a purpose, at most, of becoming good hereafter, and to mend to-morrow ; or next week, or some time to come, whatever is now amiss. And this purpose of mind (and it is well if it may be truly called a purpose) we think very acceptable to God, and that it will satisfy him at present.

Par. You will not deny that good purposes are very acceptable to God.

Min.

Min. I do not deny it. To purpose or resolve to do every thing we ought to do, in such time and season as it ought to be done, is acceptable to God. And so to purpose the doing hereafter of that part of our duty which is to be done hereafter, is good and acceptable ; but to purpose only for the future, what should be now performed, is not so.

Par. We usually say, and I think we say well, *Better late than never.*

Min. That is true too : but take heed that you do not so long purpose and purpose, and so long talk of to-morrow, till there be no to-morrow left to begin in. It may be too late, and then it will be never. But do you know, when you say you purpose to be good hereafter, what this that you say really amounts to ?

Par. It amounts to this, that I find God hath given me a good mind, and hath put it into my heart to amend my life, and if God grant life, I am resolved to do so.

Min. But seeing God hath now granted you life, why begin you not now whilst you have life, but drive it off to a time when you have no assurance that God will give you life ?

Par. We have no assurance indeed, but we hope the best.

Min. Let me tell you then what all this signifies. It is no more but this, that you have much love for sin, and little for God ; for you cannot yet find in your heart to part with it to please God.

Par. You put the worst construction upon it.

Min. Nay, it is the best that can be made of it. You cannot but know, that you have no certainty at all of any time to come, or that you shall live one hour longer to serve God ; and yet you will now serve sin, and put off the service of God to a

time whereof you have no certainty. Is not this to love sin better than God ?

Par. You now put me hard to it, I confess.

Min. Well ; but suppose you were sure that you should live some years longer ; are you sure too that you shall be at any time hereafter of a better mind than now you are of ? Are you sure that you will not every day, when it comes, be purposing for hereafter as now you are ? As long as you have the same love for your sins, and no more love for God, you will be still as forward to delays ; and what reason have you to hope that your affections shall be changed ?

Par. We hope that God will give us grace to perform our purposes.

Min. Do you hope so indeed ? Nay, it is plain you neither hope it, nor desire it yet, whatever you may do. I say, you yet desire not such a change of your affections ; if you did, you would endeavour it also ; hearty desires never go without strenuous endeavours, and the more would you now endeavour it, did you indeed desire it, because you are not certain of any longer time.

Par. You make me wonder to hear you make thus light of good purposes for the future.

Min. I must farther tell you, that such a purpose of doing hereafter what we should do now, is a very great addition to all the rest of our sins, and we thereby, all we can, provoke God to cut us off suddenly, and to deprive us of the benefit of the time to come, which we hope for.

Par. This seems yet stranger, that good purposes for the future should be provocations of God.

Min. What greater sin can we be guilty of, than to cherish and make much of our sins, which we know are odious to God ; and to use all the shifts we can think upon to keep them as long as we

we can, and to resolve not to part with them, till we are driven to it by mere necessity? What greater provocation of God can there be, than thus to prefer the enjoyment of our sin, even for so small a time, before the enjoyment of God and his favour, which we know we cannot have so long as we keep our sins? How can we provoke God more than in setting thus light by him and his love, that we will make it our choice rather to humour ourselves in fulfilling our lusts, than to please him in obeying his commands; that we will yet sin a while longer, even though we know it dishonours him, and therefore pretend to purposes of leaving our sins; and that we will not begin to serve God, till we can serve the devil no longer with safety? How think you must God take this, that we will give the best of all that we have, the choice of our time, and of our strength to the devil, and give God his leavings, as if they were good enough for him? This is in truth, both the folly and the wickedness of all such delays, when we have said all we can to excuse them: and all our pretended purposings to serve God hereafter, are mere mockeries, and no better; and yet with such purposes as these, are we willing to deceive ourselves.

Par. God help poor sinners! What would you have us to do, if we may not purpose to amend?

Min. I pray God help us both to will and to do. This must we do, begin to amend with the first purpose so to do, and resolve to continue so doing to our lives end.

Par. I acknowledge your advice to be very good. Yet if we shall not be able to follow it altogether, there is hope yet that God will be merciful to us.

Min. You now bring to my mind another common way, I may call it, the high road to Self-deceit.

Par. More and more yet ! It is well if there be any other way in the world besides these self-deceiving ways.

Min. Doubt it not, there is a sure and safe way to heaven ; yet are the ways to destruction very many, and amongst them all none hath more travellers in it, than that I am now naming : it is a *vain confidence in God's mercy.*

Par. What will you leave us to bring us to heaven, if you take from us our confidence in God's mercy ? Are all those great things which we read of the mercy of God in his word written in vain, that we may not confide in it ? Hath he not assured us, that he is very good and gracious, pitiful, and long-suffering, slow to anger, and of great kindness, pardoning iniquity, transgression and sin ; and shall we, after all this, let go our hold of God's mercy, and not be allow'd to comfort ourselves in that ?

Min. God forbid, that I should ever dissuade any of you from confiding in God's mercy, which is the sinner's only sanctuary ; but it is a vain confidence herein, that I tell you is dangerous, and that wherewith many thousands deceive themselves.

Par. I would fain know what you call a vain confidence ?

Min. That am I about to tell you. Know then, that all these great things which are told us by God, of his own mercy, are intended to be our encouragements to serve God chearfully, and with a willing mind ; and to repent of our sins, turning to him with all our hearts, in hope of his gracious acceptance and forgiveness of all our weaknesses and failings. But we are ready most wretchedly and wickedly to abuse all these declarations of God's mercy into encouragements of presumption, and continuance in sin. For thus
sinners

sinners are wont to reason with themselves. It is true (say they) God hath threatened no less than eternal death and damnation to those that do so and so ; but yet he is a merciful God, and of a loving and gracious nature, and will not be so severe in the end as some would persuade us he will be. He will be better than his word, and he thus threateneth for a terror only to keep us in better order, as the best kings and governors are wont to do, annexing very heavy penalties to their laws, which yet they never meant to exact, but remit either all, or the greatest part of them. These terrible menaces are but to affright us and keep us in awe at present, and to render the grace and goodness of God our governor more glorious in a free pardon and act of grace. Thus from the abundance of God's goodness do men take occasion to abound in sin, and, contrary to all principles of ingenuity and good nature, make that abominable use of it which the apostle speaketh of with so great abhorrency, they *sin more that grace may abound, and turn the grace of God into wantonness.*

We consider not as we ought, that it is below the majesty of the great God to use those little sorry shifts of magnifying his grace and goodness, which the most potent of earthly princes are sometimes driven to ; he hath other ways more becoming himself to do this by. They may be forced to set up scare-crows merely to affright men awhile, and then on a sudden remove them, to oblige their subjects to entertain an opinion of their clemency ; they may sometimes threaten most, when they know it most unsafe to punish, and proclaim their pardons to persuade men they are unwilling, when indeed they hold it unsafe to punish. But dare we think that the great *King of kings* hath any reason to deal thus ? Wants he

either power or wisdom, that he should betake himself to such petty arts as these? No, we may be sure of it, that as he is *God Almighty*, and can do what he will; so he is a *God of Truth*, and will do as he hath said. He is *the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin*; but then mark what followeth, *and will by no means clear the guilty*, *Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.* He is good, and he is just too; he will pardon, but he will also punish. He threateneth not in vain, no more than he promiseth in vain: he promiseth to encourage us to obedience, and if we be obedient, we shall reap the benefit of his promises, otherwise, though his promises were made to us, the performance belongs not to us; and therefore, when we receive not what was promised, he hath not broken his promise, but we by disobedience have rejected it. So he threateneth to move us to repentance, if we repent we shall escape what was threatened; for though the threatening was to us, yet the thing threatened doth not belong unto us, because of our repentance: but if we repent not, that which being threatened would not affright us from sin, shall in the end be sure to fall upon us for sin. And yet is God no less merciful for this. Nay, his very threatening us with hell and damnation, is a very great mercy, if we would but see it. His severest menaces are to let us see the danger of sin beforehand, that we may not blindly run upon destruction: he threatens hell to keep us out of hell; but if we will not take warning to keep out of it, we have nothing to blame but our own wilful refusal of mercy, if we perish without mercy. Let no man therefore deceive himself by presuming he shall find mercy in the day of judgment, when he refuseth it in the day of grace.

Par.

Par. God forbid we should refuse God's mercy at any time ; nay, we with all thankfulness accept of it, and put all our trust in it.

Min. You do not absolutely refuse mercy ; you would have God to shew you mercy, I doubt not that. But do not you refuse mercy on such terms as God doth offer it ? And do not you presume that God will shew you mercy upon your own terms ? This is God's free mercy, that when we lay under condemnation for sin, he hath offered us a pardon through Jesus Christ, and that upon no harder terms, than repenting of our sins, believing in his Son Jesus Christ, and obeying his Gospel. If then you will have mercy at the day of judgment to acquit you finally, you must now accept it on these terms.

Par. Then, for ought I can yet see, we are utterly undone : if our obedience to the Gospel be a condition without which God will not have mercy on us, then who can be saved ?

Min. Why say you so ? It is a great mercy of God to make you such an offer, as to pardon and save you upon condition of obeying Christ's Gospel ; in this hath the grace of God appeared unto us.

Par. Who can obey the Gospel of Christ ? is it mercy to offer us a pardon upon such condition as we cannot perform ? Such is this ; for no man can obey the Gospel.

Min. I am sorry to find you leavened with this opinion, by your declaring whereof you have brought to my remembrance another way of Self-deceit, that is, this false supposition, *That the laws of God, under which we live, are impossible to be kept.*

Par. Call you this a false supposition ? I always thought it had been a certain truth, that no man can keep the laws of God.

Min.

Min. And by this thought, I fear, that both you, and many more, deceive yourselves daily.

Par. I wonder how you can make that appear.

Min. With too much ease. For whilst you think God's laws impossible to be kept, you cannot think yourselves obliged to keep them, because no man can be tied to do that which it is impossible for him to do. Hence you go on in disobedience, and yet think yourselves safe, seeing obedience being impossible can be no duty. You suppose that your duty at most is to be moderate in sinning, and to take but a little of it. You say your nature is such, that it cannot well be with less than you use: and thus you never endeavour after the perfection of Christians, because you look upon it as impossible to live as God in his word hath commanded you, and therefore a vain thing to attempt it: Yet you think yourself safe, because you say it cannot consist with God's goodness to exact a thing impossible, though, as a wise Governor, he may command it.

Par. God knoweth our infirmities, and how inconsistent with them the perfection of his holy laws is; and he is pitiful, and will make allowances for our infirmities, else it is impossible for any man to be saved. We live as well as our corrupt nature will suffer us; but who is able to obey so holy a God, and such holy laws, as he hath given us? Nay, we are very sure that all men are sinners, and when they have done all that they can, they must all die sinners. For so are we told, that *if any man say he hath no sin, he deceiveth himself, and the truth is not in him*, 1 John i. 8. To say then, as you say, that the laws of God are possible to be kept by any man, is, according to St. *John*, a Self deceit.

Min. What St. *John* saith is very true; but you may, and, I fear, do mistake the meaning of his words.

words. What think you? Is not that also true, which the same St. *John* in the same epistle also saith, that *he that is born of God sinneth not*? 1 John iii. 9.

Par. It must be true, being a part of God's word; but, I suppose, it cannot be true in your sense, that such a man keeps the whole law of God.

Min. I will shew you anon in what sense I take it. Now, let me tell you, that God never gave any law to men, which it was impossible for them to keep when he gave it to them. It is very true, that the law of perfect innocence, which was first given to mankind, is now become impossible to us; and it is as true, that the *law of faith*, as the apostle calls it, *Rom. iii. 27.* under which we live, is not impossible to us. When God gave the law of innocence to man, it was in his power to whom it was given to have kept it. This, as I said, it is now become impossible for us to keep; and he, who saith he is so without sin as to be innocent, deceiveth himself, as St. *John* saith most truly. Tho' therefore this law of innocence be still God's law, and is so far in force as to shew us what is our duty as we are men, what by the law of our creation we ought to have been, whence we are fallen, what punishment we have deserved at God's hands, how miserable we must for ever have been without God's mercy and pardon, what reason we have to be humble and very vile in our own eyes, what need we have of a Saviour, and how thankfully we should accept of him; yet, because it is impossible to be kept by us, we are sure it is not any longer a condition of our salvation. There is therefore a new law given unto us, by the keeping whereof we must be saved. There is a gracious pardon for the violation of the former law already granted and sealed, and put into the hands
of

of our Saviour for us men, as we are sinners and guilty persons; and no man shall be condemned for not keeping that law of innocence, which it is become impossible for him to keep, but only such as do not accept the pardon which is now freely tendered unto us in the Gospel of Christ upon such conditions as it is possible, through the grace of God, for us to keep and perform; and we are not now *under the law, but under grace*, Rom. vi. 14. The *law of faith*, under which we Christians live, supposeth us sinners, and such as cannot be innocent; but withal it obligeth us to a new righteousness, which will never be dispensed with; and such a righteousness it is, that of them who have it, that of St. *John* is truly said, *He that is born of God sinneth not*, he doth not allow or indulge himself in any sin.

Par. I desire to have this a little better explained; for I perceive already, that it is a matter of very great concernment.

Min. You must know, that the righteousness of Christians is such as supposeth infirmities in us, and consisteth with them; but it is also such as doth not, as I said, consist with our indulging ourselves in any of our infirmities: It alloweth us repentance for sins already committed, and it admitteth of sincerity instead of perfect innocence; but it alloweth no wilful continuance in any the least sin. The great duty incumbent upon us by the *law of faith*, and which we must do, or die eternally, is, in short, this; “ That we be hum-
 “ bly sensible of our vileness, and our weakness,
 “ and our misery; of our sinfulness in breaking
 “ the law, and our weakness in not being able to
 “ keep it, and our demerit or deserving justly for
 “ our sins the wrath of God, and eternal torments;
 “ and that acknowledging all this, we become as
 “ sensible of God’s goodness to us, in not leaving
 “ us

“ us to perish, as we have deserved, but providing for us a new way to life ; and that we most thankfully and heartily accept of this mercy, as he now tendereth it unto us in Christ Jesus our Saviour : That we first apply ourselves to learn, and then willingly and unfeignedly consent to the terms that he hath made, which are these ; that we set ourselves in good earnest to strive against all sin ; that we heartily desire, strenuously endeavour after, and fervently pray for the sanctification of the Spirit ; that we make it our constant care to live according to the rules of the Gospel, and that doing thus, we trust to the mercy of God for the pardon of all our failings, and the acceptance of our weak and imperfect performances, and the reward which he hath promised, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour.”

Do you see any thing impossible in this?

Par. I cannot well tell what to think of it.

Min. Are you willing thus to do?

Par. I am much mistaken in myself if I be not.

Min. Do you do your utmost endeavour to live according to the Gospel of Christ, and to resist all sin ; and do you find yourself troubled for every failing herein?

Par. I hope it is so with me, in some measure.

Min. If you heartily and earnestly endeavour to be good, this is that which the law of Christ requireth of you ; and that doing so, you trust your soul to Christ for salvation. But if you neglect to do your endeavour, and shew yourself thereby unwilling to live as a Christian, what reason can you have to complain of any such impossibility as you talk of? It is certain, that all men can do what they can do ; and Christ's law requireth no more than this, that you be heartily willing and desirous

desirous to do what yet you find you do not, and to pray to God for the help of his Spirit, and to make use of such means as he hath ordained. Be not deceived therefore, we are under a most gracious law, and do it we must, or else we cannot be saved. It is the law of a Saviour, and given to us in compassion to our infirmities, with all the indulgence that we could reasonably desire, and with all the allowances that are needful, in consideration of our weakness. But Christ hath not given us leave to go on in sin, nor to love it, nor to indulge ourselves in our infirmities, nor to make farther allowances to ourselves, nor to abate of the work which he hath enjoined us, nor to hope for or expect any more allowances from God than are given us already in the Gospel.

Par. I am in good hopes that I do my duty acceptably to God, and that he owneth me for his child, else surely he would not bless me, as I find he doth; for, I thank God, I want nothing, but he prospereth my labours, and I thrive in my estate, and enjoy my health, which I look upon as a special token of God's love and acceptance of what I do.

Min. You do very well to be thankful to God for all these good things, seeing they all come from him; and you are to account them testimonies of his goodness, who giveth you so many good things above your merits, and would have you encouraged by them more faithfully to serve so bountiful a Master, that you may be for ever happy in his favour. Yet after all this, it's well if you have not here found a way to deceive yourself, which is the last I will now mind you of.

Par. I should be sorry to find that I deceive myself, in thinking myself in God's love and favour, because he blesteth me with good success in my affairs.

Min.

Min. Suppose you should shortly meet with some great cross, or fall into great want or affliction; would you believe me, if I should tell you, that you are no good Christian, because God blesteth you not with success, and you do not thrive as formerly?

Par. God forbid I should fall into any such calamity as you suppose.

Min. I do not desire you should; but suppose it, would you think yourself no good Christian for that?

Par. I hope I should find no reason to think so ill of myself.

Min. Just as much as you have now to think better of yourself, because you thrive and prosper in the world. There cannot be a more deceitful way of reasoning about your spiritual state than this.

Par. How can it stand with God's goodness and justice to afflict good men, and prosper wicked men?

Min. Do not you every day see, that very wicked men prosper in the world, and are full of all outward good things; and also, that very good men are many ways afflicted?

Par. Yes, I cannot but see it, unless I should go out of the world.

Min. Why then should you ask how this can stand with God's goodness and justice? It is as you see, and yet God is good and just, and therefore you may be sure it stands both with his goodness and justice, that it should be so.

Par. I know not; but it seems very hard to conceive how it should do so.

Min. It doth seem hard to many, and the not understanding it hath occasioned many foul errors. It was a thing which exceedingly baffled the wisest heathens of old, how the world should be govern-

ed by the providence of a good and just God, whilst ill men fared so well, and the best men so ill, in the world: and not only they, but many good men of old, and others now amongst us, who have many more convincing arguments and evidences of God's over-ruling providence ordering all things both in heaven and in earth, have been too forward to make a bad use of this common observation of the inequality of mens conditions in this world. Good men have been, upon this one account, censured as hypocrites, as was *Job* by his friends; and for no better reason have some esteemed themselves, and others such as themselves, holy and beloved of God, and even his very darlings. How wretchedly men have, in all ages, befooled themselves by this fallacy; and how sadly many parts of the Christian world have smarted under the effects of this *Mahometan* conceit, is too well known. And yet it is very easy to see how unreasonable a conceit it is, such is, and ever will be, the unconstancy of what men call *fortune*; so various are the vicissitudes, wheelings and windings about of it, that the winds themselves are not more alterable or subject to change.

Par. *Do you think then that these things we speak of thus happen by fortune or chance?

Min. No such thing, we all know, or may know if we will, what God hath plainly taught us, that even he himself, *who walketh upon the wings of the wind*, Psal. civ. 3. and *bringeth the wind out of his treasures*, Psal. cxxxv. 7. maketh even *the stormy wind to fulfil his word*, Psal. cxlviii. 8. And though we see not into the reasons of his doings, yet can he, who is infinite wisdom and goodness, do nothing but wisely and well: *He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*, Matt.

v. 45. He distributeth these earthly things, which are commonly called the blessing of his left hand, in an arbitrary manner, according to his absolute Sovereignty and Dominion, yet still by the rules of infinite wisdom, and in goodness; though it be so, that *no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before him*, Eccl. ix. 1. *The ungodly prosper in the world*, Psal. lxxiii. 12. *And many are the afflictions of the righteous*, Psal. xxxiv. 19. yet is the one no less ungodly, or any more in God's favour for his prosperity; neither the other less righteous, or less in God's favour for his afflictions: nay, the chastisements of God are, to good men, the choice tokens of his fatherly love, *Hebr. xii.* And on the other side, the very *prosperity of fools shall destroy them*, Prov. i. 32.

Par. This is Scripture indeed, and must be true; yet the reason of it is not so clear to me as I could wish.

Min. I have not now time to discourse it so largely as it deserves, but in a few words will say what should content you, and direct you how to shun this way also of Self-deceit. Know then, that God hath blessings of an higher nature than all earthly good things can amount unto, wherein he will make known his special love unto his children. This world is but the common-hall, where all the great family is promiscuously fed, and they that are most disorderly and unmannerly commonly fall a scrambling, and catch to themselves the greatest share. The children have a table by themselves more richly furnished, but with fare of another kind, whereby they are fed unto eternal life, and are preserved and fitted for an eternal inheritance, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them. A most gross piece of folly then it is, for men to value themselves much upon their abundance of the things of this life, and to con-

clude, that because God feeds them like swine, filling their troughs for them as long as they will eat, therefore he loves them better than his children, whom he stints to a moderate and wholesome diet, and makes them sometimes fast, and sometimes take bitter physick, for their health, and often chastiseth them with the rod of correction: Yet is this a general Self-deceit; so long as men go on undisturbedly in their ordinary callings, and thrive by the labour of their hands, they make no question but they please God, and that he loveth them, and approveth of their ways. And very seldom are such men awaked out of this silly dream, or brought to consider their own sad condition by any thing they either read or hear out of God's word, till it please God, by some cross or disappointment in their worldly concerns, or some sickness or affliction, to pinch and awake them. They cannot think him displeased at any thing they do, till he shew his displeasure in some outward calamity.

Par. I hope I have now profited very much by this day's discourse, and my affairs call me hence, so that I will ease you of your trouble for this time, thanking you heartily for your great pains with me.

Min. You are very welcome to any thing which I may be able to contribute to your happiness; try me as often as you will, you shall find it so: but remember that the blessing is of God, and therefore cease not to crave it in fervent prayer.

S E C T.

S E C T. XII.

*Some signs of SELF-DECEIT, and
especially of seeking colours for sin.*

Par.



Am come, Sir, once again, to crave your assistance. You have been pleased to shew me many of those ways whereby we are wont to deceive ourselves; and, I hope, I shall make good use of this discovery which you have made unto me, and take good heed henceforward to my soul. That which I am yet desirous to learn of you, is, by what means I may most easily discern the deceitfulness of my own heart: Will you therefore now tell me what are the signs of Self-deceit?

Min. Whether or no you be a Self-deceiver, you may be reasonably well enabled to know, by what I have already told you concerning the nature and ways of Self-deceit. Your greatest care must be, after you have been thus far informed, to shun those ways of Self-deceit which have been discovered to you. However, I am willing to make you all the help I can in this matter, and shall, accordingly as you desire, point out unto you some of those things, whereby the Self-deceiver doth ordinarily betray himself to the notice of others, and by which, if he will be persuaded to observe them, he may be as easily discovered to himself.

Par. In so doing you will do me a very great kindness, for I am very desirous to know myself well.

Min. Most of those things which do plainly discover a man to be a Self-deceiver, may, I think, be reduced to these three heads. *First*, a seeking for colours and excuses for his sins. *Secondly*, a willingness to venture, in all his actions, to the very utmost of what he supposeth lawful. And *thirdly*, a making some less considerable duties juggle out those which are most necessary.

Par. Shew me, according to your own method, in the *first* place, how the excusing or colouring of our sins discovereth us to be Self-deceivers.

Min. This, methinks, you might see without my shewing it unto you. He that hath no mind to come to as clear a knowledge of himself as he may attain to, but is desirous to seem to himself either very good, or at least not so bad as indeed he is, must needs be a Self-deceiver; and for no other end but this doth a man invent excuses and colours for such things as he seeth amiss in himself, but to hide himself from himself, that his conscience may not be troublesome to him, by telling him too plainly what he is. He would not think his faults to be faults indeed, or he would not think them to be great and damning sins, or he would not think himself to be a very bad man; and to blind himself, and to stop the mouth of an accusing conscience, it is a great part of his study to invent excuses for himself, either wholly to hide, or at least to extenuate and lessen all his sins, that they may not be a continual trouble and terror to him.

Par. But are there not some things to be considered about sin, which do either excuse us for committing it, and render it no sin in us, or at least

least extenuate and make it a less sin than otherwise it would be? And if there be such real excuses and extenuations of sin, surely a man may lawfully make use of them for his own comfort, and not to consider them seems to me a Self-deceit.

Min. Sin is that which is against the law of God. It is either doing that which is forbidden by God, or the omitting of what God hath commanded, or doing it otherwise than he hath directed. Now it is certain, that no man can have a good excuse for breaking the law of God. Indeed every sin hath such circumstances, as may make it a greater or a less sin in God's account; and the consideration of these circumstances must make it appear, as it is, less or greater to us. But I speak of seeking out something to make sin seem less than really it is, and that is certainly to endeavour to deceive ourselves. And this more I will tell you, that it is always safest for sinners to aggravate their sins, and to be desirous to extenuate them is always an ill sign. We are not apt to be too vile in our own eyes, or to be too humbly conceited of ourselves.

Par. Will you lay before me those excuses for sin, whereby you say we discover our Self-deceit?

Min. That is an hard task; they are so very many, that it is impossible for me either to reckon them up, or indeed to know them. But whosoever is conversant among men, cannot be ignorant of many of them. The chief of them, as I can call them to mind, I will point out unto you.

Par. That is as much as I can desire of you.

Min. You do not expect that I should trouble myself to tell you by what signs notoriously wicked men, such as common swearers, thieves, fornicators, drunkards, prophane scoffers at sincere piety, and such like, do discover themselves to be

deceived; but only that I shew you some of those excuses whereby men and women, that seem to be of the better and more sober sort, are wont to plead, why they live not so conformably in all things to the Gospel of Christ as they ought to do.

Par. Such gross sinners as you but now mentioned, if they entertain any hopes of being saved whilst they continue such as they are, do sufficiently proclaim to the world their Self-deceit. 'Tis the other sort of persons you speak of, concerning whom I would be satisfied. But when you seem to intimate that they deceive themselves in not walking conformably to the Gospel in all things, I do not well understand you. Alas! our natures are too much corrupted by the sin of *Adam*, to live in that purity which the Gospel commands.

Min. The Gospel commands us to endeavour after the highest degrees of purity that we are capable of; and to endeavour this in those ways which the Gospel directs us to, is to live according to the Gospel. And here you have prompted me with one of the Self-deceiver's excuses, and a very common one.

Par. Will not the *corruption of our nature* excuse us, though we be not so holy as the Gospel commands us to be?

Min. Because of the corruption of our nature was the Gospel of God's free grace and goodness given us; and it brings with it a remedy for that corruption, and commands, as a condition without which no man shall see God, such a purity of heart and life, as that corruption can no way excuse us from. And this is not a perfect holiness in this life, but *a cleansing of ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and a perfecting holiness in the fear of God, 2 Cor. vii. 1.* If this be our work
and

and constant sincere endeavour, it is the purity commanded in the Gospel; and to excuse ourselves from this by any thing, is Self-deceit.

Par. I know not that; but, I am sure, many think it a good excuse, and rest satisfied with it.

Min. I fear you say too truly. There is nothing more common than for men, when they are charged home with their sins, to fly to hide themselves in the hole of the rock whence they were hewn, and to lay all the blame on *Adam*, from whom they derived a corrupt nature; and that corruption wherewith they come into the world, is usually pleaded in excuse of all the wickedness which daily groweth up from it.

Par. I see not yet any reason why it should not be accounted a good excuse. How can we help it, that we are born in corruption, or that this corruption worketh in us?

Min. We cannot help that indeed, but we need not cherish and feed that corruption; yea, the Gospel both commands and teacheth us to resist it, and daily more and more to cleanse ourselves from it.

Par. But our very corruption itself disables us from doing that; and it is not our sin not to do that which we cannot do.

Min. How far it may be our sin not to do that which, because of that corruption, we cannot do, is a point too intricate and hard for you at present to understand. But this it is needful for you to know, that though naturally of ourselves we are not able to do this, yet God affords us the assistance of his *Spirit*, and invites us in the Gospel to accept of it, and our natural weakness cannot excuse us from accepting of help, when it is graciously offered us.

Par. But still our corruption is so strong, that it holds us back from accepting of such help, and what can we do?

Min. Are you willing and desirous of that help? If you be, you need not fear God's blessing on your hearty endeavours. If you be not, is not this Self-deceit, to plead your weakness whilst you are unwilling to be strengthened? Consider what I say; Shall the rottenness of the tree be thought a good excuse why it bears corrupt fruit? And must that be thought enough to keep it from being cut down, and cast into the fire, which rendereth it fit for nothing else but the fire? Whilst men plead the corruption of their nature instead of resisting it, and say they cannot help it, when they never go about to correct it, is it not an evident sign that they love it too well, and are better pleased with their impotence than their duty?

Par. We are not pleased with our weakness; but we cannot help it if we be weak.

Min. Suppose you have an idle servant that falls sick and weak and so leaves your work undone, and pleads in his excuse, that he is too weak to do it: you have procured a physician for him, and at your own charge offer him the means of health, and he will not make use of your kindness, but lies sick and works not, yet he calls for his wages, excusing himself by his sickness for not doing his work, and telling you he could not help it. Will you accept of this excuse?

Par. There is no reason at all why I should do so.

Min. Yet he said truly, that he was disabled by sickness to do his work.

Par. Yea, but he might have been well, if he would have used the means which I had provided for him, and therefore his illness can be no excuse.

Min.

Min. Such a servant then shews plainly, that he loves his idleness better than his work ; and that he had rather be sick and lie idle, than have his health, and labour.

Par. Nothing can be plainer.

Min. Do not you now see, how you are condemned by yourself ? We have in the Gospel of Christ a remedy prescribed us by him, the wise and good physician of our souls, for the corruption of our nature ; and grace is offered not only to make us see it, but to enable us to withstand and restrain it ; and notwithstanding all natural infirmities to do our duty acceptably to God through Jesus Christ. But now instead of accepting and using this divine medicine, we neglect it, and still plead our corruption for not doing our duty, and hope hereby to excuse ourselves. What can this signify, but an unwillingness to be healed, and a greater love to our corruption and our lusts, than to God, and the work about which he hath set us ?

Par. You have let me see my folly very plainly.

Min. When men therefore thus excuse themselves, as you may hear them doing very commonly ; saying, Alas ! our natures are corrupt, and we are no more but weak men, we can do no more or better than we do, without more grace ; when God shall enable us by his grace, we shall do better, till then he requireth no more of us, but to live as well as we are able, and according to that measure of knowledge and strength which he hath given us. Whilst they thus seek to excuse themselves, do they not deceive themselves ? That grace which they want, is freely offered them, and they will not receive it. Is not this all one, as if a servant should excuse himself for not buying what his master had commanded him

to buy, by his want of money to buy it with, when money is offered him, and he will not be at the pains to count it, or to reach his hand out for it?

Par. The case, God knows, is too plain ; and it is the case of most of us. But we have yet this comfort left us, that we have before us many examples of very good men, who because of their natural corruption lived not altogether according to the Gospel, and yet found mercy with God. Yea, we know that the best of men have ever had their failings, and they are recorded for our encouragement. *Noah* was drunk, and *Lot* committed incest, and *David* was an adulterer and a murderer, and *Peter* denied *Christ* with oaths and cursings, and all the *disciples* forsook him and fled ; and we cannot hope to excel such holy and righteous men as these, for so the scripture calls them, notwithstanding these great sins ; but we may well content ourselves with our infirmities, when we find that the strongest have betrayed their weaknesses. Yea, and we daily see, that even they that are most exemplary and noted amongst men for their rare and almost singular piety, are not able to carry it so evenly and smoothly in their walking, but now and then they fall, or step aside out of the way as well as other men.

Min. I see you will save me the labour of shewing you what excuses men are wont to make for their sins, you are yourself so perfect in them. This is a second very common excuse whereby Self deceit discovers itself, as it doth now in you, if you speak this in earnest. This I say, of alledging for yourselves, when you are minded of your sins the *examples of good men*, who have been sometimes guilty of like sins.

Par. Truly I am in very good earnest, and look upon these examples as recorded in scripture to
this

this end, that we poor sinners should comfort ourselves by the remembrance of them.

Min. Guilt would fain hide itself behind any thin bush, and men would fain take sanctuary in the failings of the saints from the wrath and just vengeance of God pursuing them for their wickedness. Those slips and infirmities of righteous men, it hath indeed pleased the *Holy Ghost* to keep upon record for all mens reading, that seeing the weaknesses of the best of men, and that otherwise very good men have been surprized with sin, we should thereby learn what cause we have to be very vigilant over ourselves, and take heed how we be too bold with those temptations whereby we find that the strongest men have been overcome : and beside this, we should learn to be more charitable, and not rashly to censure our brethren for every sin, neither be quite dejected, when we ourselves have been at any time overcome, as they were. But we must beware, how we think them recorded, either for patterns to imitate, or so much as encouragements to embolden us in any wickedness. They are encouragements to those who have sinned, to make haste and repent, and to hope for pardon and acceptance upon their repentance ; but to comfort ourselves in our sinfulness by them, is to deceive ourselves. Such pleading for our sins from example, can argue nothing that is good ; but shews, that as we have sinned, so we also love to sin ; and had rather find out any little fig-leaf to hide it, than a plaister to heal it. Instead of a Saviour to deliver us from our sin, we would have a Patron to defend and countenance us in it. Before it can be any encouragement to us that we are like the best men in their failings, it must be our care to be like them in their virtues, and to repent as they did. Though he that walketh most circumspectly and
warily,

warily, may sometimes stumble and fall, and he that seeth him from heaven, pitieth him, even as a father pitieth his child, and lifteth him up again; yet can this be no warrant for him to expect the same favour, who having warning given him, and the strictest command to consider his ways, shall yet walk on heedlessly, as though he were in no danger, or had no rules to go by, without any regard to his steps, or the directions that God hath given him.

Par. I confess my error, which you have now made me see very clearly; and I hope God will forgive me, because I do not wilfully offend. But, alas! we are ignorant; and, God help us! we lack that knowledge and understanding that you and others have. For my own part, I have had but mean education, and want learning, and so do many more, who some of them know not a letter in the book; who if they could read, or were scholars, could live, it may be, as well as others do. However, we live according to the best of our knowledge, and we hope that God will require no more of us.

Min. Still you are resolved to be beforehand with me; for here you have hit upon another of those excuses which discover the Self-deceiver. This is too common a thing with most of you to *plead your ignorance* in your own defence, as if you hoped that you should be able to give God the slip in the dark, and that his justice shall not find you out, so long as you yourselves do not know well where you are, or what you do. How ordinary a thing is it to hear most of you, whenever you are told of your sins, to answer just as you now do?

Par. And do not we answer with good reason? Can you or any man else expect any more of us, than to live according to the best of our knowledge?

Min.

Min. It were well indeed, if we could see you live according to that little you seem to know; very few of you do so. Yet if you did, whatever we expect more of you, God expects more, and it is easy for you to know what.

Par. I cannot tell what more God can expect, but that we should live according to our knowledge.

Min. Yes; he expects that you should know more, and be always *growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, 2 Pet. iii. 18.

Par. That is true indeed, but I did not now think of it.

Min. It is well, if most of you think not too little of it. What can your pleading ignorance signify, but that you have a mind to deceive yourselves by going on blindly in the dark? If God have given you both eyes and light, can you complain justly, that you cannot see? Let me ask you, Is Christianity your calling and profession, or is it not?

Par. Why should you ask me such a question? you know well enough, that we all profess to be Christians, and have been brought up in this profession from our infancy.

Min. If a man of any trade or profession undertake to do some work for you, and do it not as he ought; if a taylor make you a suit of cloaths, and spoil them in the making; or if an architect undertake to build you a house, and when it is built, you find not one convenient room in it, or shortly after it falls down again, and all your money is lost; tell me whether in such cases you will take it for a good excuse, if they tell you, they are ignorant, and understand not the trade they profess?

Par. You cannot think me such a fool; if I hire a man but to plough for me, I expect he should

should know how to do what he undertakes, and expects a reward for.

Min. How unreasonable then are you, that profess yourselves to be Christians, and expect the reward of Christians, and yet think it enough that you plead your ignorance, and say, that you understand not the work and duty of Christians?

Par. Alas! we have not had the opportunities of learning that others have.

Min. Have you not opportunities of learning all that is necessary for Christians in general to learn? Have you improved the opportunities of learning, which you cannot deny that you have had? Have you not the rules of your profession laid open before you in the Bible? Have you not the same rules explained, together with the use of them, in many good books? Have you not teachers set over you by God, to train you up in your profession? Have you not all the helps that can be imagined needful for you? And will it, after all this, serve your turn to say, you are yet ignorant in the religion you profess? If you will not learn it, why did you engage in it, or continue to profess it? If you will profess it, why have you not learnt it?

Par. Many things have hindered us, and we cannot now help what is past.

Min. Can you hope to enjoy the privileges and blessings of Christians, and not do the duty of Christians? And can you do the duty of Christians, and not understand it? When men plead they are ignorant of what they may know if they will, and must know, or else they die, what can it signify but an unwillingness to learn, and a vain hope to be happy without so much as learning how they may be holy?

Par. I hope you shall never be able to say truly, that we are unwilling to learn.

Min.

Min. They that are truly willing, would be at more pains to learn, than most of you will be at. I will instance in that only, which so many complain of, that they have not been taught to read, and now they say they cannot learn, but would give, I know not what, that they could. Do you think they are in earnest?

Par. I hope they are.

Min. Should a man offer one of them to settle immediately a thousand pounds a year upon him, on condition he would learn to read, and besides that, be perfect in some good catechism, within a convenient time; do you think that he would not presently learn all this, and in a short time attain to such a measure of knowledge as is necessary for a foundation of a christian life?

Par. I know not; but I think such an offer would do much, and make a man put himself very hard to it, but he would do as much as you say.

Min. Yea, I dare say for him, he would not stick at a far harder task than this, for a much less reward. And then, if God and heaven cannot prevail with men to do, what for some worldly profit, they both would willingly, and could easily do; is not only their unwillingness the cause they do it not? And is not this pretence of difficulty a mere colour for their laziness, and a notorious sign of Self-deceit? It were greatly to be wished, that all could read, that knowledge might enter as well by the eye as by the ear: and yet I hope a blind man may learn to be a good Christian, though he cannot be taught to read. One thing however, by the way, let me mind you of; that seeing reading is a thing of so great advantage, and that men are apt to plead their want of it as an excuse for themselves; you that are parents, make it your special care, whatever you
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can do for your children besides, to see them taught to read in time, that they may not lay all their failings in their duty hereafter on your shoulders for your neglect herein. And those who have had such careless parents, and have not been taught in their childhood, I would desire to consider how they think they shall be able to answer for their not learning to read now, seeing they account it so needful to their being good Christians.

Par. Would you have old men and women go to school with a horn-book at their girdle?

Min. I would have them learn to read if they can possibly, be they never so old. And if it be so needful to read, that without it they cannot be so good Christians as they ought, which is their own pretence, then if they can learn it no otherwise, it is much better to go to school among children, than to hell among devils. No man is too old to learn his christian duty any way that he can learn it best, except he think himself too old to go to heaven and be saved.

Par. But you consider not how full of business poor ignorant people are, that labour hard for their livings, and how little time they have to learn in.

Min. Christian knowledge might be learnt even at their business, would they at such times discourse about that, as much as they prate of other impertinent things. They have time to eat and sleep notwithstanding all their business, and methinks they should find a little time too to learn the way to heaven in. Nay, I have not known any of these poor busy labourers you talk of, but I have seen them sometimes at play, when it had been fitter for them to have been at work; yea, and often, when they should have been at church to learn; and many of them can sit idle, or lie snoring

ing from supper to bed-time; and as they follow the cart or plough, or sit in the shop, can sing foolish songs, which they have found time to learn. Yet can these find no time, you say, to learn how to honour God and save their souls. They have much love to either in the mean time. Once for all, I tell you, that all pretence of ignorance must needs be without excuse in this nation, where the means of knowledge is brought home to every man's door; and it is a gross Self-deceit to think to excuse ourselves by our ignorance, which itself must needs be our sin.

Par. You have made me sensible that it must be so; you shall not need therefore to say any more of it, but proceed to what you think good next to mind me of.

Min. As some men endeavour to hide their sins in the darkness of ignorance; so others go about to add some *beauty* and *lustre* to them by the advantage of a pretended light, which they have above other men, and such as the ordinary Christian's eye cannot bear. There is hardly a sin forbidden in the word of God, though never so expressly and plainly, but they have learned an art to make it none, where, and when, and in whom they please; nay, it shall in themselves at least be a virtue, though it may be such as they will not allow to be so in any beside themselves. Neither is there a duty commanded in the scripture in plainest words, but they have a trick when they please, either to make it of no necessity at all, or of no concernment to them, and so no duty of theirs: or if they allow it the name of a duty, they have a way to persuade themselves that they do it, when they do it not, and so will never own that they are defective in any thing that is needful to make a good Christian.

Par. These are arts above my skill, and I bless God, that I never understood them.

Min. You know not but you may be a cunninger artist in some of these arts, than you yet think yourself to be ; for you must remember, that they are arts of Self-deceit.

Par. I should be very sorry to find it so. But let me hear, I pray, what such men do, thus to delude themselves ?

Min. They have always in a readiness some nice distinction or other, to make a seeming difference between what is forbidden, and what they practise, though they be in truth the very same. And often they distinguish so long, till they leave hardly any thing at all either of sin or duty. They can cleave a hair so often, till every part of it become invisible. By this means drunkenness shall be made any thing what you will but drunkenness ; and pride any thing else but pride ; and covetousness rather any other thing than covetousness : or else these shall be themselves in some persons whom they have no kindness for ; but they must be quite other things in others, whom they have a mind to favour : or again, they shall be at one time, when it seems for their interest, what indeed they are ; but at other times, when it is inconvenient they should be themselves, they must be something else. And thus it fares also with that true and serious piety, and religious conversation, and every thing that belongs to sincere Christianity. All shall be made even what they please to have it, superstition, or hypocrisy, or a giddy zeal, or any thing else that it is not. By this art the sacred oracles of God shall be most wretchedly wrested, or craftily eluded, and by the help of such distinctions be made more ambiguous than those lying oracles of the heathens ; they shall be made to speak the language of every deceitful

ceitful heart. All the commands or prohibitions of God shall be forced to bear the sense that mens lusts think fit to give them; and if mens works will not suit with the rule, the rule shall be bent till it be made agree with their works. Thus do men abuse the light itself, to blind their own eyes, and make their guide their seducer; and it shall no more lead them, but they will force and drive it into all the paths which they love to walk in, though it know them not, and though they be never so dangerous.

Again, when these men have taken what they will, and left what they will, either of sin or duty, then have they coined new names to bestow upon every thing, that it may pass more currently for that, by the name whereof they like to call it, and would have it mistaken. The covetous man must be henceforth called a provident man, and a good husband. Uncharitableness must be called thrift and prudent wariness: cowardise shall be called discretion and wise caution; and rashness shall be called zeal; yea, and envy, hatred, anger and malice, and it may be, rebellion too shall bear the same name: a drunkard shall be called a good fellow, a boon companion, or a sociable man; flattery shall be termed civility, and fraud, policy, and prophaneness and scurrility, wit; yea, and the devil himself as much as in them lieth, shall be christened, and the saint shall be besmattered into a devil, and every degree of goodness above what they love to practise, shall be hypocrisy, or a foolish preciseness.

What more notorious sign of Self-deceit can there be than this? And say you, if it be not very common among men, that every the lewdest sinner is ready to bring some warrant from the sacred word of God, who hates iniquity, to countenance his sin, and to maintain that which it most

expresly forbiddeth ; or an excuse from the same for his omitting what it as expresly commandeth ? If you quote against them the plainest words of the *Holy Ghost* to convince them of their sin, they have always some other sense to fasten upon those words, than they will bear, and to shuffle you off with some false interpretation of them. Thus men, instead of inquiring of God what they ought to do, will teach God what to command or forbid them, and to say all is right and good that they love, and all evil which they hate. Instead of consulting the scriptures to find out what God's will and pleasure is, that they may obey it, they consult it mostly to find out a more plausible way of dishonouring God, with the greatest quietness of conscience, and of ruining their own souls, without fear of damnation.

Par. Now, that you have laid these things so plainly open before me, I must needs acknowledge, that it is a very common thing among us, and also that it is a certain sign of a Self-deceiver. For to what end should men do all this violence to the word of God, to countenance their sins, but that they have not a mind to know their sins, or themselves to be sinners ? But for all this, I cannot think that all those things which you are wont to condemn, as heinous sins, and which you would make us believe that the word of God doth so expresly forbid, are indeed damning sins.

Min. Why should you think so ?

Par. Because I cannot see any great evil in them ; that is, I do not see what great hurt they do in the world, many of them, and therefore I cannot think that God hath so severely forbid us the practice of them. Will God damn men for that which doth no hurt ?

Min. I see, that if men have not wit enough to wrest the scriptures to their own and others destruction,

instruction, as that great wit the devil hath taught too many to do, and to glory in it when they have done; yet rather than fail to deceive themselves, they have other shifts at hand more than enow, to do themselves this mischief, whereby they daily discover themselves to be Self-deceivers.

Par. Do you see this by what I but now said?

Min. Yes, too plainly. This is another excuse men have found out for the evil whereof they are guilty, that *they cannot see what hurt they do in the world by those things which they practise.* And yet they can give no other reason why they think that they do no hurt, but only this, that they do not, or rather will not, see the hurt which they do.

Par. I think I should willingly acknowledge the hurt which is done by any thing I practise, if I once could see it; but so long as I see it not, I cannot own it.

Min. You are not to consider so much what harm your sin doth in the world, as how it is contrary to the will and command of God. *Sin is the transgression of the law,* 1 John iii. 4. And if what you do be a transgression of the law, that is enough to make it a sin, though you can see no other harm that it doth in the world.

Par. But I cannot think that any thing can be a transgression of the law of God, but that which doth hurt in the world.

Min. Then you think, that not to think upon God, nor to honour and love him, nor to pray unto him, and many more such omissions of your duty of piety towards God, are no sins, because you see not what hurt they do in the world. I might name abundance of duties, the omission whereof you would say doth no hurt, and abundance of sins, the commission whereof you would also say doth no hurt, and yet are they certainly duties or sins, notwithstanding such thoughts of

men ; for it is not man, but God that is lawgiver to the world, and the judge of duty or sin.

Par. Will God condemn that which is not evil ? And is that evil which doth no hurt ?

Min. Whatever God hath forbidden, you may before it is evil, whether you see the evil of it or no. But, tell me, doth that do no hurt which hurts your own soul ?

Par. Who can think so ?

Min. All sin doth hurt many ways, and to many. Yet is it reason enough to any but an atheist, carefully to shun it, because God hath forbidden it : and it is reason enough to any but a fool, perfectly to hate it, because it doth hurt, and the greatest hurt that can be to himself. None but an atheist will deny, that God hath authority to command or forbid what he will ; and none but a fool will seek to excuse himself, for going about to undo himself by disobeying God's will ; and this every sinner doth, whatever hurt he doth to others. The drunkard, the glutton, the proud swaggerer, and even all those especially that wallow in the sins of pride and luxury, and brutish sensuality, have this commonly in their mouths, that they hurt no body, and therefore what hath any one to do with them ? But above all, they who live in a daily neglect and omission of their duties of piety towards God, are ready thus to excuse themselves, that they do no body any harm. Are they themselves no body, no not to themselves ? Is it nothing of harm to them, to perish both soul and body everlastingly by their wilful disobedience to their Maker ? But can such men in earnest think that they do no hurt to any but themselves ? Do they never consider how great a wrong every sin is to God ? He cannot indeed be hurt by our sins, but he is most highly injured by them, more than any other can be.

be. His authority is despised, his law and command slighted, we wilfully displease and offend him, boldly affront him, rob him of his due, which is all honour, love and humble obedience, and absolute subjection ; and can we think that there is no hurt in all this ? Nay, can such men think that the world suffers no harm by such sins ? Is it nothing to abuse the good creatures of God, to his dishonour in intemperance, and pride, and luxury ? Is it no hurt to the world to omit those duties which might bring down a blessing upon it, and whereby it might be benefited ? Is it no hurt to it to cherish and countenance the evils which it groans under by our ill examples ? Is it no hurt to it to provoke God by our sins to pour down many grievous judgments upon it ? When men awake once out of their dreams, and come but so much again to their senses, as to know that they are men ; when their lusts will give them leave to consider what they do, they will see that there is a great deal of hurt done to the world, as well as to themselves, by those things which they now count harmless, and till they consider this, they do but deceive themselves.

Par. But however we may be mistaken in those things which we think do no great hurt, because they may do more hurt than we know or consider ; yet there are some things which you tell us are sins, and bring us scripture for it, which we cannot think to be so indeed, and for this reason ; that they do not only no hurt, but much good to the world, and nothing else but good is intended by them.

Min. This is indeed another pretence, where-
with the Self-deceiver useth to flatter and mightily to please himself : he thinketh he doth much good in the world by his sins. Whether he really intend to do good by them, or whether some good

follow what he doth by accident, or rather by God's over-ruling providence, all is one, by this he encourageth himself in evil-doing.

Par. I wonder how you can call that evil-doing, whereby good is done?

Min. As I told you before, you are to judge of good and evil by the law of God, and not either by your good intention, or by the good which followeth. The *apostle* abhorreth the doing of *evil*, that is, of that which God hath forbidden, that *good may come* thereby; and saith plainly, that the *damnation* of them that do evil with that intention, is *just*, Rom. iii. 8. And they who can be so foolish, as to think that to be no evil or sin which is followed by good, must, upon their own principles believe, that the *Jews* did no evil in procuring the death of Christ, because by his death came the greatest good, even the salvation of sinners; or that they did no evil in killing the prophets, and those that were sent unto them by God, because they thought, that therein they did God service. To intend good is good; but we ought also to be well satisfied, that what we intend as good, be good indeed; it is not sufficient that it is good only in our imagination. And when we know that it is good, and that in our intention we aim at it, we must be governed by the word of God in our prosecution of it, and not chuse out such means as we of our own heads judge fittest. This always remembre as a most certain truth, that we cannot honour and glorify God by breaking his commandments: although God can glorify himself thereby, and even by our disobedience, effect what good he pleaseth. Where our sin aboundeth, God, for the glory of his goodness, is graciously pleased to shew to us the abundance of his grace: but this excuseth not, but aggravateth our sin, if we hence take encouragement

ment to sin that grace may abound. Whatever good comes by us unto the world, we are no better for it, except what we do be done in obedience to God's will, and according to his directions.

Par. I see my mistake by what you have told me; and I shall not give you any farther trouble at this time.

Min. If your occasions will allow any longer stay, it will be no trouble to me, at this time, to discourse a while longer with you.

Par. My business is not much; I only feared to trouble you too long, else I can be well content to hear you out upon this subject.

Min. Come then; sit down again, and tell me in good earnest what now you have to say, why you do not live more like Christians than most of you do, seeing these excuses, which you usually make for yourselves, will stand you in so little stead?

Par. Alas! Sir, you cannot but know what kind of times these are wherein we now live. Had we lived in the days of our fore-fathers, when religion flourished, we might possibly have lived more virtuously, and suitably to our holy profession; but it is our hard lot to be cast upon such an age of the world, as will not admit of so strict a life.

Min. Have you found out this shift also to silence your conscience with? When men are so hard put to it, that they can by no means hide their sins, nor make them look as if they were harmless things, wherein there is no danger, then they do all they can to shift off from themselves the guilt of them, and lay the blame on something else; and any thing in the world will serve to bear it, so they can but find a little colour to make it look like an occasion of their sinning, for then they suppose they may safely disburden themselves
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of all fault, by laying it on that which they suppose occasioned it. Thus you would lay all the blame upon the *present times*, or *this age of the world wherein you live*. And you are not alone in this; I have heard many others say the very same, to alleviate their guilt. And yet it is hard for any man to know what you mean by the *times*, and I question much, whether you yourselves do well understand your own meaning, when you say you live in *bad times*.

Par. I thought I had spoken so plain, that you could not doubt of my meaning.

Min. If you speak properly, and without any figure, by the *time* or *age* wherein you live, you mean what I am very loth to think you mean.

Par. What is that, I beseech you? I mean no hurt, that I know of.

Min. You mean, that there is some such *time*, that is, such *days* and *years*, as will not admit of a holy and Christian life.

Par. Suppose this be my meaning, what hurt see you in it?

Min. Very much; for it would be all one, as if you should say, that God, who ordereth the times and seasons of all things, doth so order them, that, in some certain years or ages, it is impossible for a man to be good and do his duty; or that they, whose lot it is to be born in such a time, must needs be wicked. And if this be your meaning, whatever you aim at I know not, but through the times you cast the blame of your unchristian life upon God himself; for who but he, as I said but now, ordereth the times and seasons? And who but he ordereth it so, that you were born to live in these fatal times rather than in others? So that you say in effect, that though God requireth of us to live good Christians, upon pain of eternal death, yet he ordered our coming
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into the world at such a time, wherein we cannot live as Christians, but must as surely perish as we are born.

Par. I intended not, by complaining of the times wherein we live, to lay any blame upon God Almighty ; far be that from me, and all men, to charge God with our failings.

Min. I hope you had no such intention ; but what then do you mean by the bad times ? Do you mean, that you live in times wherein most men are evil, and sins and wicked practices are become fashionable and customary, even as if they were as seasonable in this age, as the fruits in autumn ? Such customary sins men commonly call the reigning vices of the times, that is, such as most men in these days practise, and very few are ashamed of.

Par. You have explained my meaning better than I could have done.

Min. If this be your sense, then all that you say ; why you live not as Christians should do, is no more but this, that you are so vain, that you must needs be in the fashion, though it cost you more than you are worth, even your salvation. As some of our fine gallants in their apparel and dress will be in the fashion, though it be never so prejudicial to their health, or lay them in prison for debt in the end. Must you needs walk in the broad way, that leadeth to destruction, because the most walk in it, and you can see but a few in the narrow way, that leads to life ? Were the sins of other men, amongst whom we live, so contagious, that, with all our care, we could no way escape the infection, we pleaded a great deal for ourselves, in saying we live in such times : but though sin be, of all others, the foulest, and most certainly mortal disease, yet even this plague cannot seize us, except we will ; and that deprives us
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of all excuse. God hath provided us of a sovereign antidote, his grace is sufficient for us, if we will but use it; and if we will not, we deserve to die. If men are ashamed to be well when they see most men sick, and will be content to be sick for company when they need not, only for fear lest fools should laugh at them for being so wise as to have a care of their health, they must blame themselves if they die for company too; and they perish very deservedly with the many, who would not, when they might, live and be safe with the few.

Par. All this were something, if there were no more in it than being laughed at for being singular, and out of fashion. But there is more to be considered than so; for vice and wickedness are countenanced by great examples, and true goodness is discouraged and frowned upon by the mighty. Honours and preferments are made the wages of flattery and sinful compliances with the humours of those in whose hands they are to confer at pleasure, and they place them not where they ought, but where they like: and such as will be good, and have the courage to obey God rather than humour men, sit in disgrace, and are despised.

Min. This indeed is for the most part the sense of them that are aptest to complain of the times; and this word [Times] is made choice of rather than some others, because they can by this more safely reproach the *government* under which they live, than by speaking their mind, as you have now done, more plainly. But suppose all this be true that you say, yet what in all this do you say that can excuse you for not leading a Christian life? What would you have done had you lived in the morning of Christianity, with the primitive Christians, under heathen princes, and in the midst
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of infidels, and in hourly expectation of being dragged to the tribunal of your persecutors, and made to seal your profession of Christianity with the sharpest of tortures, and the cruellest of deaths? Did the Christian religion ever flourish more than under such pressures? Were Christians ever more like themselves and their Saviour, than when they were thus in continual dangers in the midst of their inhuman enemies? How would you live like Christians in *Turkish* slavery, as many of your brethren have done? If you have not the courage to be good when goodness is a little out of favour, or dare not shew yourselves Christians; if the men in power give you a sour look, you are willing to endure but a very little for Christ's sake, and shew but little love to him who loved you, even to the death of the cross. This surely is not the taking up of the cross and following him; this is not the denying of ourselves that we may be his disciples. Thus to excuse ourselves for violating the laws of Christianity, is, in truth, to renounce our Christianity, and to follow Christ for nothing but his loaves; if these once begin to fail us, we will go after him no longer. This plea then speaketh nothing but our love to this world more than to God and heaven, our valuing earthly prosperity above heavenly felicity, and the countenance and favour of men more than the blessing of God.

Par. We were in a very sad condition, if we should do thus as you say; should we not prize God and heaven above all earthly things, we should shew ourselves to be fools indeed: We live in hopes of enjoying God for ever in heaven, and all our comfort is, that when we die, we shall do so, else to think of dying, and leaving all this world behind us, would be the most dreadful thing in the world to us.

Min.

Min. How can you make any rational man believe, that you value God and heaven so much as you say you do, when you dare so boldly venture upon sin, which separates you from God, and unfits you for heaven? If for fear of losing the favour of great men, or of losing any thing which they can give you, or take from you, yea, if for a little pleasure of sinning, you will venture to displease God, this is no good sign that you value God and heaven above all things. And that you live in hope of heaven, and comfort yourselves in this hope, signifies no more but this, that you know you must die, and can then enjoy this world no longer; and seeing it must needs be so, and you cannot help it, you are willing there should be something that you may enjoy after that; and though you have no mind to make such a change, yet, because it must be so, you are content it should be so, and comfort yourselves as well as you can in it.

Par. You cannot persuade me yet, that I do not value God and heaven above all earthly things; but there are many things in the way, which you seem not to consider so well as you should. Tho' it be the desire of our hearts to live altogether as Christians ought to do, yet we live in a wicked world, and are drawn in by wicked companions to do often what we have no mind to do.

Min. You will never be without something or other to lay the fault on, which you are ashamed to own. Here is another trick of a Self-deceiver, *I was merely drawn into it* (saith he) *by my company.* But let me first ask you, Who drew you into such company? Who is to blame for choosing such companions?

Par. Do you think we always choose bad company? You are mistaken, our business necessarily engageth us in it.

Min. I say not always, but, I fear, it is too often your choice, and you are willing to have more business with such companions than you need. To such I say this only, If you be unwilling to comply with ill company, why do you needlessly frequent it? If you be willing to be in such company, how can you hope to excuse yourselves by any temptation unto which you willingly expose yourselves? But suppose you say truly, that your business is such as must engage you in the company of bad men, as indeed it is true, that but few, if any, can live in this world, but they must needs sometimes converse with the wicked men of the world, will it follow that you must needs be drawn in by them to sin? I hope there be some that can converse with wicked men, when there is just cause so to do, and not partake with them in their wickedness. This is so true, that, I hope, I need not spend time to prove it to you.

Par. I readily grant it. But our business is often such with them, that it cannot be done, except we comply with them.

Min. If mens employments be such as necessitate them to a compliance with wickedness, it behoves them speedily to cast off all such employments, for no business can become a Christian, that cannot be done without violating the laws of Christ. And if their business be such, that though it must needs engage men in the company of the wicked, it may yet be done without partaking with them in their wickedness, then can it not excuse them for being drawn into sin by their company. What is it that bad company can do to draw you into sin?

Par. They can do the devil's work, and tempt us.

Min.

Min. That indeed they are too perfect in ; but the best is, they can do no more than their master could teach them to do ; they can but tempt us.

Par. Is not that enough ?

Min. Yes, and too much for them to do, as they will hereafter find to their sorrow, but not enough to excuse any man for being drawn into sin by them.

Par. How so ?

Min. Because it is our duty to resist the temptation ; and though it be the devil himself that tempteth, yet if, as we are commanded, we *resist him, he will flee from us*, Jam. iv. 7. And if we may resist him, certainly we may also resist his children and slaves. Would you try this, you would soon find it true by experience ; such companions will soon be weary of your company, if they see you resolved not to do as they do. Therefore this attempt to shift off your guilt is but one of the Self-deceiver's shuffling tricks.

Par. Yet after all this, you seem not thoroughly sensible of our condition : you, and such as you, are engaged by your very calling and profession, to a more strict and religious conversation, than our callings and conditions of life will allow us to lead, and yet you talk as if you expected we should all be able to live as you do.

Min. I desire that you should live much better than I do, even as well as I *should* do. By our particular special calling, as ministers of Christ in his church, it is our duty to be examples to the flock ; but then is it also the duty of the flock to follow our example, so far as we are followers of Christ, and no farther. We all profess to be Christians, and should live as Christians. That calling therefore, the offices whereof cannot be executed without breaking the laws of Christianity, is not a calling allowed by Christ, and therefore
must

must not be the calling of a Christian, but is to be forsaken for Christ's sake, how gainful or honourable soever it be among men. What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? If we cannot so live by our calling, whatever it be, as that we may live eternally, or cannot so discharge the offices of it as not to dishonour God by it, we are concerned to change it for some other calling, wherein we may honour him.

Par. But though we would change our calling for a better, yet such is our condition that we cannot.

Min. Whatever your condition be in this world, be it prosperity or adversity, be we rich or poor, high or low, it is the work of grace to teach us to behave ourselves in it as becometh Christians, and to bear it so, as to keep a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men. Therefore to plead our condition in excuse for our sin, is Self-deceit.

As you would excuse yourself by your condition, so would others excuse themselves by their age, whether it be childhood or youth, manhood or old age. There is none of these but they afford such persons as are always hunting for excuses and colours, something to say for themselves why they do not their Christian duty. Young persons plead, that they are ignorant and unexperienced, and the rawness of their green years will not bear the fruits of holiness and righteousness: This age is always thought a sufficient excuse for a multitude of sinful extravagancies.

Par. You will not expect that gravity and seriousness in boys and girls which becomes men and women.

Min. No; but God expects those duties at their hands which their age is capable of; whilst they are

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but children they should be learning to be men; and they are now to live like Christian children, learning both to understand and do their Christian duty, and must not be allowed to learn evil, and by custom to contract such bad habits, as they cannot, without great difficulty, cast off when men; and by their so doing, make it almost the only task of all their lives after, to unlearn the evil which they have learned in their youth. In short, young persons, that are of age and ripeness of understanding, sufficient to frame excuses for their sins, as most of them very early are, must needs be of age enough to understand the sin which they would excuse, or the duty which they would shuffle off; and therefore their very making excuses from their age is inexcusable in them, the very pretence of ignorance is its own confutation, and the colour vanisheth at its first appearance in the light.

Manhood in the next place is active, and engageth in the world among men in the management of worldly concerns; and this is thought by many a sufficient plea for all the dirt that sticketh unto this age. But that greater strength of reason, as well as of body, which fits men for more masculine business, should fit them as well to foresee, and prevent, or arm themselves against the temptations which ordinarily attend such business. It is the proper work of manhood to behave ourselves like men, and manfully to resist unto victory the evils which are to be encountred in our way to heaven, and whereby, if we be vanquished, we are no longer men, but beasts.

Old-age complains much of dulness and weakness, and a great inclination to peevishness and passion: it is unactive, and wants the spirits and vigour of manhood, and much more to this purpose. But all this is without fault, if it proceed from

from age only, and the decay of natural strength, and if that decay be not (as too frequently it is) caused or hastened by sin. These things incident to this age, are a sufficient apology for not doing what they disable us to do, but they are no excuse either for not doing what we can do, or for doing what we neither need nor ought to do. He adds to the weakness of age, that pleads his natural weakness for his moral impotency, and saith he is too weak to do good, when he finds that he hath strength enough to do evil. He that would excuse his sin by his old age, sheweth indeed that he dotes, but it is (as fond, doting parents do on their darling children) through too much indulgence to his beloved lusts. Every age hath its proper work and duty; and that is not a duty in any age of a man's life, which in that age he is not capable of performing. And therefore to excuse our sin by our age, is also a sign of Self-deceit.

Par. I perceive it is so; but, God help us! the devil is busy with us, and deceives us by his temptations.

Min. He is so; and delights not only to deceive us, but much more in seeing us so forward to deceive ourselves. Take heed however how you think to excuse yourself, by laying all the blame upon him. He is indeed willing enough you should do so, because he knows you deceive yourselves in doing so; and so you will but follow him to hell, he is well enough pleased you should call him your leader; and that you should thus plead for your following him, that you are not able to withstand, when he so powerfully draws by his temptations. But I need not tell you again, that the devil cannot force us to do what we will not do, nor deceive us, unless we will be deceived. Our great grandmother *Eve* found,

that it would not suffice to say, *The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.* And we have now less reason to trust to the same plea, seeing we have not only seen the weakness of it in her, but are very well assured, that he cannot thrust any of his sweet poisoned morsels into our mouths, except we be as willing to gape for them. And having told you this, I think we have said enough of those first sorts of signs of Self-deceit, that is, the excuses and colours men seek for sin.

Par. Will you please to go on to the other two now, or shall I wait on you some other time to hear them?

Min. I shall need do very little more than name them to you, and therefore we will dispatch them now.

Par. What then is the next sign of a Self-deceiver which you will point out unto me?

Min. It is this; A man's venturing as far in all his actions as he thinks he may safely go; to the very utmost of what he imagines is lawful.

Par. Why should any man abridge himself of the liberty which God hath given him? Why should he not thankfully accept of it, and use it? And he doth no more that doth what is lawful, though he go to the utmost of what is allowed.

Min. I know no reason why he should not, if he do certainly discern it, and is very sure that he always stop on this side of sin. But it is not very easy for all men to be sure of this, nor indeed for any man in some cases; so many things are to be considered before the lawfulness or unlawfulness can be clearly discerned, that it is very hard for a man to say he hath considered them all, as he ought in some cases.

Par. But we are commanded to *stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath set us free, Gal. v. 1.*

Min.

Min. We are so, and must obey that command. But we should understand *first*, what that liberty is. *St. Paul* there speaks of a liberty which Christians had from *circumcision*, and the ceremonies of the *Mosaick* law, which he calls a *yoke of bondage*, which some *Judaizing* Christians would have laid on the neck of the disciples, as that without which they could not be justified. Another kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath also made us free, is the liberty from the dominion of sin, to which we are therefore commanded to yield ourselves servants no more. But you find not that it is any part of the liberty wherewith Christ hath set us free, to do every lawful thing to the utmost of what is lawful; yea, 'tis a part of our Christian liberty, that we may abate of our liberty as we see just cause for it, and use it to the utmost only when 'tis safe so to do, as always it is not. When our governors, whom God hath commanded us to obey in all things lawful, command us something, wherein we were otherwise at liberty, we are to go to the utmost of what is lawful to obey them, both for *wrath* and *conscience sake*, for our own security, and to obey, as God hath commanded the magistrate. In like manner we are to do, to avoid scandal, and when 'tis expedient for the peace of the church. And for the same reasons we are to *abate* ourselves of our liberty. But he that for no other reason but his own pleasure shall ordinarily venture as near a sin as he may, shews but too good a liking to it, and is more bold than wise. It cannot be safe to dance too confidently on the brink of the pit, nor to walk securely on the borders and confines of vice, no more than on the narrow battlements of a high tower. It is not easy for every one to discern the small line, whereby virtue and vice are parted from each other. The one may be called the country of

God, where he reigns ; the other the devil's country, where he governs : now these two join so nearly, that a man may quickly step out of the one into the other, and be in the devil's quarters before he is aware of it. He is a very cruel tyrant, and a bad neighbour ; it is not safe to dwell too near him ; 'tis a miserable thing to come within the borders of his kingdom. Till therefore the just limits and boundaries be more exactly known, he that hath a mind to be safe, will think it a needful prudence to keep aloof off, and not to venture so far, that the next step may ruin him. He that is always stretching his tether as far as it will reach, looks as if he had a mind to break it. To use all the liberty we can get, is too plain a sign that we love our liberty so well, that we could be well content to have more. Where the affection of the heart inclines us to go, an easy invitation will prevail with us to go on too far. He that loves to walk upon the very edge of the bank, needs not any strong temptation either to push or pull him into the ditch.

Par. There can be no question made of it ; but it is always safest to be as far off from danger as we can, and that he that is too bold and venturesome, shews more courage than wisdom : I am therefore well satisfied that it must needs be a sign of a Self-deceiver boldly to venture as near to that which he certainly knows to be a sin as he can. What, I pray, is the last sign you mentioned ?

Min. I shall tell it you in few words. *When men make one duty to juggle out another, or when they excuse themselves by doing something which is really a duty to be done, from doing a greater duty, which at that time should rather be done.* As if a man shall stay at home and read good books, when he should be at the publick worship of God in the church ;
or

or should be praying in his closet, when he should be saving a neighbour's life, or his goods. When a man chooseth the easiest and cheapest duty, and shuffles off thereby that which is more difficult or chargeable, he shews he would be at as little pains and cost to serve God as he can. Now we must know, that God, who hath appointed our duty, and set us our daily task, hath also appointed an order wherein he will have it done, and hath made a fit season for every part of our work, and every thing is beautiful in its season; and to do one work when God expects another, is no less disobedience than to sit idle: and that same thing which at one time is our duty, at another, by being unseasonably done, becomes our sin. But thus it is, there is no man but he finds some duties more suitable to his own natural temper and inclinations, than others, and in these, be sure, he will find most pleasure and delight, because they are most easy to him; and men will rather exercise themselves in that wherein they can take most delight, and which they find most easy to them: and then their constancy in these encourageth them in their security, and to judge more favourably of themselves, though their remissness or negligence in other duties be never so great. We are too apt to think that we serve God well enough, if we do but even any one of these many things which he hath commanded us to do; yea, or if we leave undone the things which he hath forbidden us to do, though we do almost nothing of what he hath enjoined us. But we should consider that our duty is to be done in every branch of it, and every part of it in its due season. And that the right timing of every duty is a great part of it, wherein we are to be guided by the proper rule of duty, which is the will of God, and not our own inclinations; God's will, and not our

ease or convenience, should be consulted by us. He that makes that which he can most love, or which he finds most easy, his main business, and gives it place of other less pleasing duties, is ruled by himself, and not by God, and serves himself rather than God, and is a Self-deceiver.

Having given you these few signs of Self-deceit to gratify you in your desire, I will not now stay you any longer, but bid you good-night, hoping to see you again at your best leisure.

Par. I shall not fail to do myself that kindness, to wait on you again so soon as I can, and I heartily thank you for the freedom you allow me.



S E C T. XIII.

The great unreasonableness of SELF-DECEIT.

Min.



Elcome, neighbour; what use have you made of our last discourse? Have you, by any of those signs of Self-deceit, which, at your request, I then shewed you, found out the deceitfulness of your own heart?

Par. Sir, I have spent some thoughts upon what you then told me, and am verily persuaded, that there are but few among us that do not deceive themselves. For my own part, I am very sensible that my heart is a very deceitful thing, and I have to this time been strangely blinded by my own Self-deceivings.

Min.

Min. I hope then, you are also as sensible of your great folly in so doing, as you are that you have so done.

Par. I cannot say that I am yet so sensible of that : for though it cannot but sound ill, that a man should deceive himself ; yet I know not how, the thing itself hath something of a bewitching sweetness in it, for which I can hardly think so ill of it as you would have me.

Min. But if you be convinced once, that you are or have been a Self-deceiver, I should think it very easy for you to see the evil of it, and to be convinced also of the folly and unreasonableness of dealing treacherously with your own soul. All the difficulty of convincing us of our folly, lieth in this, that this folly is our own ; and there is some difficulty in making a fool to see a fool in his own coat, or to confess himself to be a fool. To shew a blind-man to himself, and bring a fool acquainted with himself, seems to be alike easy. If this were once done, that we could be once convinced that we are fools, and that it is our interest to grow wiser for ourselves, a very few words would suffice to shew us the absurdness of Self-deceit, and especially where it is in matters of nearest and weightiest concernment to us. Tell me, are you willing that another should deceive you ?

Par. That question is soon answered ; for I think no man will say, that he is willing to be deceived by another.

Min. I think as you do, especially where a man is sensible that it will do him hurt to be deceived. But would you be content to be deceived by others, even where you cannot see any great hurt that you suffer by it ?

Par. If I be deceived, and cannot help it, I must be content ; but I am sure I would not willingly

ingly be deceived by any man, though I should suffer no great hurt by it.

Min. Why would you not in such case be deceived by others?

Par. For the very shame of it; for it seems to argue folly and shortness of reason, or at least negligence and want of consideration in a man to be easily beguiled and cheated.

Min. And yet in some cases there is no great shame or disgrace in this, especially in light and trivial matters, which are of little concernment to us; or in difficult matters, wherein a wise man may very easily be mistaken. Again, let me ask you, are you willing to deceive others?

Par. Although, I doubt not, but many who are both ashamed and angry to be deceived by others in the smallest matters, are yet willing and industrious enough for their own advantage to deceive others; and some men even boast and glory in their wit and cunning to over-reach, or, as they will have it, to outwit their neighbours; yet, for my own part, I would deceive no man, and I find very few who are willing that others should account them deceivers.

Min. Why are they unwilling to be thought so?

Par. Because every man, however he may slight or blemish another man's, is naturally tender of his own reputation, and though his very trade be knavery, yet he would be thought an honest man.

Min. He would so; and among others, for this reason; that under the reputation of an honest man, he may stalk to catch his prey, and not be suspected till he be felt. He is therefore tender of his reputation, because he hopes to have an advantage by it for the management of his knavery.

Par.

Par. It is as you say.

Min. And do not you even hereby see already the absurdity of Self-deceit? Shall a man be ashamed, both of deceiving others, and of being deceived by others; and not be ashamed both to deceive himself, and be deceived by himself at once; and that always to his own hurt? Would you not be ashamed to be a knave and a fool both? and in this case you must be both, if either; a knave in deceiving, and a fool in being deceived.

Par. I see you have a mind to talk pleasantly. Well, Sir, I pray you, say in good earnest, is it so dangerous a thing as you would have us believe?

Min. Why should I persuade you to think it dangerous if it were not so? And what reason can you have to think it otherwise? Would you be thus deceived in your worldly concerns? Would you deceive yourself in your husbandry, or in you bargaining with men?

Par. No; it is certain I would not.

Min. And are not the spiritual and eternal concerns of your souls much more valuable, than all your worldly concerns?

Par. Without doubt they are.

Min. Yet in matters relating to this world only, where less care and caution is needful, much more is used; and is not this extreme folly? You will not commonly so far deceive yourselves, as to think you are rich when you are poor; or that your debtors have paid you all that they owe you, when they have paid you nothing. You will not easily be persuaded to think that a man hath done you no hurt, that hath put out your eyes: yet in the eternal concerns of your souls, you can be well contented to be blind, and to be led blindly through error and deceit to destruction.

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And so unwilling are you to see your folly and madness herein, that you will hardly pardon, or be reconciled to him that hath offended you no otherwise, than by shewing you the most necessary kindness and friendship in the world ; that is, to tell you, you are out of the way, and desire you to open your eyes, and see whither you are going ; so shewing you more mercy, and being more pitiful to you than you can find in your heart to be to yourselves. You look upon it, many of you, as an unpardonable piece of cruelty in your best friends, to endeavour the restoring of you to your sight ; because when your eyes are opened, you must needs see what fools you have made of yourselves. O ! what an unmannerly rudeness do some of you account it in the Ministers of Christ, to offer you in his name that sovereign eye-salve of the Gospel ! To cure your disease, if it must cause the least smarting, is a crime not to be forgiven. To enable you to discover the fallacies you put upon yourselves, you think is to make you miserable, and to torment you, as the devils said, before your time. You care not though you fall into the bottomless pit of hell, so you may but fall into it blindfold, and not be terrified with the sight of it beforehand. You are much more willing to suffer the worst things that can be at your own hands, than to be thus befriended by others ; as a madman had rather be at liberty to cut his own throat, and to do all the mischief his madness hurrieth him unto, than have his hands bound. You had rather be cheated out of heaven by yourselves, than have yourselves detected for cheaters. You had rather be utterly ruined, and undone to all eternity, by your own simple dotings, than have your folly displayed before your own eyes, or be taught to deal fairly, honestly and faithfully with your own souls.

souls. And doth not the unreasonableness of all this appear sufficiently unto you of itself?

Par. Wilfully to undo ourselves for ever, seems unreasonable enough; and I think the man that would do so, mad enough for Bedlam. But still there is something, though I cannot well tell you what it is, that makes me think better of that kind of Self deceit we speak of, than you would have me to do.

Min. If you will but seriously consider these two things, I am confident you will have no better thoughts of it then I have. *First*, That no motives can be really sufficient to persuade a man to it. *Secondly*, That it will certainly bring you into the extremest of all misery in the end. It must needs be enough to make you think ill of any thing, when you know that there is no real good in the world that you can get by it, and that by it you must unavoidably be brought to suffer all the evil imaginable.

Par. Could we be once thoroughly convinced of this that you now say, we must needs hate and abhor it. But we suppose yet, notwithstanding all that is told us, that there may be motives sufficient to persuade a rational man unto it.

Min. Men do propound to themselves many things, whereby they are persuaded to it; but let them set their heads at work as long as they please, it is impossible that they should ever find out any true colour of reason, or fair pretence, why they should be content to be deceived in the great and weighty concerns of their souls. Every thing which they can think upon to this purpose, must needs at first, to a rational man, appear altogether vain and ridiculous. The thing itself is such as will admit of no plea in its defence; and it is impossible for any man that thinks what good and evil signify, to pardon himself for undoing himself:

himself : and therefore, whatever he can say to himself to countenance it in himself, must needs, even to himself, if his reason be awake, appear vain and absurd.

Par. Indeed, if we grant you your supposition, all that we can pretend, must needs be ridiculous to ourselves.

Min. What supposition do you mean ?

Par. That we must necessarily perish by it in the end. Suppose this, and then nothing can be now so considerable, as to make that seem easy or tolerable to us, or to persuade us to put it to the venture.

Min. If you can doubt of the truth of that supposition, it will be proved sufficiently anon. But suppose, what you would have, that it is not altogether certain, but may be doubted of ; can you think any reason enough to prevail with a wise man to put it to a venture ?

Par. I think it to be the part of a wise man not to let go a present good, which he enjoyeth, in hope of a future good that he is uncertain whether he shall ever enjoy or no ; and not to lie contentedly under present evils, for fear of a future uncertain evil.

Min. If that uncertain good hoped for, were of no more worth than we are sure the present things we now enjoy are ; and if the hopes we have of the good to come, were not grounded upon very probable reasons : or if again, the evil we fear were no worse than those we now suffer, and we saw not very great cause to fear it ; it were something that you say. But granting you at present the uncertainty you suppose, yet seeing the good we Christians hope for, is no less than complete happiness, and all the good things we can possibly now enjoy, are far short of that, being mixed with much trouble and vexation ; and seeing
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ing the evil we fear is no less than the bitterest of torments, and the evils we can now suffer are very tolerable when compared with them : yea, seeing that the good to come, and the evil also, are supposed eternal, unchangeable, unabatable ; and the present good or evil is short, and must quickly have an end ; it cannot be the part of a wise man rather to venture the loss of such a probable good, and the suffering of such a probable evil, than to part with a short good, or suffer some evil here in this life. Tell me, What is that good you now enjoy, or that evil you may now suffer ?

Par. You are not ignorant of the pleasure and profit which some of those things which are accounted sins, do now afford us, nor of the evils which those men are commonly oppressed with, who will not, or dare not practise the things accounted sins.

Min. I know many things which you call good and evil, and have sometimes thought them so, as you do ; but I thank God, I have now another opinion of them, and I hope so will you ere long. If I understand you, this is your meaning. You are very much in love with sin, for the pleasure and profit it affords you ; and you cannot love virtue, because you fear thereby to lose that pleasure and profit, and therefore you would find out some way to enjoy your sin safely, if you can, at least peaceably.

Par. That is indeed, my meaning ; I would not part with what I find pleasant and profitable, as long as I can think it safe to keep it.

Min. But doth not your conscience awake sometimes, and check you for doing that which you know to be sinful ?

Par. It doth so oftner than I would have it, so that I enjoy not my sin so peaceably and quietly as I fain would do, especially when you preach

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uncomfortable doctrine, and tell us so much of hell and damnation.

Min. What course do you then take, when your conscience is thus awakened, and begins to disturb your peace?

Par. I labour to silence it all I can, as who would not? I endeavour, by falling to some business, or getting into company, to drive out those troublesome thoughts; which if I cannot do, I cast about with myself how to find out something that may make what is called my sin, to seem to me to be no sin, or but a little one, and not damnable; that I may thereby comfort myself, and my conscience may fall asleep again, and torment me no longer.

Min. And are you willing thus to venture the loss of heaven, and lying for ever in the torments of hell?

Par. I would persuade myself, that there is no danger of that. I would not lose heaven, neither would I lose this world, but I would take my fill of the pleasures and comforts of this life, and hope for the joys of the life to come too. I would not be tormented for ever in hell, neither would I suffer any thing on earth that is displeasing to flesh and blood, and therefore my business is to contrive a way how to secure myself, as I hope I may, from both.

Min. Thus then, it is with you, between things to come, which you either hope or fear, and things present, which you either love or hate, you are brought into some straight and difficulty, and your study is to find out an expedient to secure your interest in both this world and the next.

Par. That is indeed my great care and study; and can you blame me for it?

Min. I hope to discover to you very plainly the folly of this course that you take, if you will have

have patience to consider the things which I shall shew you.

Par. I come with a full resolution to be instructed by you; and therefore I should lose my labour and design, should I not consider what you say.

Min. I will shew you these things following; which, when you have considered, you will confess you have taken the maddest course in the world for yourself. *First*, That it is a very great folly to love those things for the sake whereof you are content to be deceived. *Secondly*, It is yet a greater folly, to set so light as you do by those things wherein you are deceived, and to be so little concerned for them, as to leave them at a venture, for the love of any thing that this world can afford. *Thirdly*, That you attempt an impossible thing, in going about to secure to yourself those two irreconcilable interests, that of this world, and that other of the world to come. *Fourthly*, That your endeavours to silence your conscience, and to gain that inward peace and quietness which you thereby seek, is both the most vain and pernicious course that any man can take.

Par. If you can make these things clear unto me, I cannot chuse but grant, that there is nothing which I can possibly propound unto myself that can excuse me from the greatest folly in doing as I have hitherto done.

Min. And all these things are so clear, and without any difficulty to be understood, that I cannot but wonder that any man that hath eyes in his head, should not see them.

Par. I cannot yet see the first of them, That it is an absurd or unreasonable thing for a man to be in love with the things of this world, for the love whereof men are content to be deceived.

Min. Let us inquire therefore a little into the nature of them. What are these things here below which so much command our affections, and so strongly engage our love to themselves, that for the love we bear unto them, we should be less circumspect and wary as to our eternal concerns?

Par. What should they be but riches, honours, pleasures, and such like?

Min. Have we not sufficient warning given us to take heed how we love such things as these? Do you not remember what is written 1 John ii. 15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* These are the things which you love, and you see that you cannot love these things and love God too: and if you love not God, you are certainly ruined. Why then do you go on to love these things to your own undoing?

Par. We cannot but love the things wherein we find much goodness and sweetness.

Min. Is not some poison sweet and pleasant? Will you therefore eat or drink it because it is sweet, when you know also that it is killing? You love these things of the world, because they please and tickle your flesh with their sweetness, because they are a suitable provision for the flesh, and fit food to nourish the lusts thereof; and is it not expressly forbidden you to make this provision for the flesh to satisfy its lusts? *Rom. iii. ult.* What are those pleasures wherewith you are so in love, but the filthy trash whereon your luxury and lasciviousness, and every brutish appetite feedeth? What are those riches but the very dirt wherein your covetousness roul itself? What are those honours,

honours, high places, popular fame and reputation, secular greatness, &c. but the glittering baubles which please your childish fancies, the windy diet of ambition and pride? These are the fooleries which they that would for all that be thought men, so fondly love, that they grudge not to hazard heaven and all their future happiness for a present momentary enjoyment of them. These are the empty husks which serve however to feed our *deceitful lusts*, as they are well called, *Eph. iv. 22.*

Par. What harm can you find in these things?

Min. More then you are willing to hear of, as will appear afterwards; and yet, if no other harm were visible, this is enough, that they afford so little good, and yet tempt us to neglect the greatest good for their sakes. But they are hurtful; and to say how, in a word, they are deceitful, and the *deceitfulness* of these things *choaks the word*, *Matt. xiii. 22.* even the word of life, rendering it ineffectual for the nourishment of the soul. The word of God is that divine light whereby we are enabled to see the truth, and to discern it from falsehood, and to understand the true difference between good and evil. But the deceitfulness of riches, and other worldly things choaks this light, and keeps it always as it were under a bushel, that it doth not enlighten nor warm the soul. Men are first deceived into an immoderate love of these things by some false appearances of good which really is not to be found in them; and then so great doth that love grow, that it in a manner quite blindeth the judgment, so that they cannot see the excellency of the things which are of greatest worth and nearest concernment, as they are in their true and proper colours. But that I may convince you thoroughly of the great folly of being in love with earthly and carnal things, I shall commend but *three* things to your consideration.

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Par. What are those, I beseech you?

Min. The *first* is, That all these things are of an unsatisfying nature. The *second*, That the devil, our adversary, makes great use of them to mischief our souls. The *third*, That being once loved, they have most certainly a deadly operation upon us.

Par. Shew me, I pray, the *first* of these, how all these things are unsatisfactory.

Min. That they are all unable to satisfy us, yea, though they were all amassed together and heaped on the same man, we need no other evidence than the universal experience of mankind. Shew us the man that could ever find any real satisfaction or rest to his soul in the fullest enjoyment of these things?

Par. It is hard to shew such a man, not because these things, had he them to the full, would not satisfy; but because it is even impossible to find a man that ever enjoyed them in such a measure as is requisite to give a man satisfaction.

Min. To shew you how little truth there is in what you say, it is enough to consider, that ordinarily, they who enjoy them in the amplest measure are least satisfied with them, but the more they enjoy, the more they desire. And if you will stand to his judgment, who of all that we have heard of, wanted least of either pleasure, or profit, or honour that this world can afford, the matter will be out of question.

Par. Reason good, that he should determine this matter, who hath had the greatest personal experience of the things in dispute; but who is he?

Min. *Solomon*, the king of *Israel*; who as he did abound in all worldly things, so was he both by human wisdom qualified to find out the worth of them, and to make as accurate observations
about

about them as any man ; and also by divine wisdom fitted to judge of them as they deserve ; and yet after a full trial of them, he could say no better of them than thus ; *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit*, Eccl. i. Not to pursue this argument any farther, it is enough in this place to consider, what we all know, That in the greatest affluence of all outward things, we miss that which we would have, and our souls cannot find in them all any full contentment, rest and comfort, such as they naturally desire.

Par. I have known some men contented with a very small portion of these things.

Min. That is not because of the love they have for such things, but because they have learned not to love them more than they deserve. If they loved them as others do, they would not be content with so small a portion, nor with any portion of them. That content therefore which some men have with a little, they owe not to the things they enjoy, but rather to the sense they have of the emptiness of them, and their unfitness to satisfy the soul, for want of such a goodness as is suitable to human nature. Man always feels in himself the want of something which nothing upon earth can afford him. He that knows this, desires these things no farther than they are needful for the sustentation of his body ; and hence because a little is enough for that, he is contented with a little, and seeks for what he wants elsewhere : but he that knows not, or considers not the use of earthly things, as he doth not that loves them, feeling in himself, notwithstanding whatever he here enjoys, the same want, and missing of what he would have in that which he hath already, he is always seeking it in something else which he hath not yet. Either he fancieth it is not the abundance of any one thing that can give him satisfaction, and there-

fore he seeking one thing after another, trying what variety will do ; or he imagineth he hath not yet enough of what he hath already, and seeketh more, trying what abundance will do. But after all this, he finds that, enjoy whatever he will or can of this world, his want is still the same, his desire is not satisfied.

Par. Methinks, if a man had once enough, he might find satisfaction to his soul.

Min. He might, if he had enough of that which is suitable to the nature of his soul, but the things of this world are not so. If in a famine you want food, will it satisfy you to have much gold or silver, when you can buy no food with it ?

Par. No sure, it would not, because they are not food, which is the thing I want.

Min. Your soul wants food proper for it, and all the things in this world are neither food for souls, nor will buy it, therefore the soul cannot be satisfied with them. What is it that your soul thirsteth after ?

Par. To be perfectly happy.

Min. And nothing which this lower world abounds with, can make you so. For whatever you can possibly find in any worldly thing, even when you enjoy it most fully, your comfort is always much abated, both by the trouble and vexation which you shall ever find accompanying it, partly in getting it, partly in keeping and securing it, partly in anxious contriving how to improve it to your best advantage ; and most of all by the consideration of its unconstancy, uncertainty and fading nature. We are very certain of this, that none of these worldly things wherein we are delighted are in our own power, that we cannot command any of them to come and stay with us during our pleasure ; and we have no assurance given us by him, in whose power,
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and at whose sole disposal they all are, that we shall share of them in any such ample measure as we desire, or that any of them shall abide with us any considerable time. Nay, we are very sure, that either they will leave us, or we shall leave them in a very short time. We are sure that sickness, or pain, or old-age, or even any other indisposition or distemper of body or mind can render them very useless and unpleasant to us, by rendering us incapable of tasting that little good which is in them: and *lastly*, the death of these mortal bodies of ours, for the sake whereof we do so greedily desire them, and to which alone they can of their own nature be useful for any short time, will make a final separation between us and them.

Par. I confess, that this is an uncomfortable consideration, and we must now and then be troubled with it whether we will or not. And yet, though these earthly comforts, for this cause, cannot fully satisfy, they afford us much comfort and delight however in our life, and therefore ought to be loved.

Min. How they may be loved, I shall shew you anon. In the mean time you seem convinced, that they cannot give a man full satisfaction of mind, which is all I desire you to grant yet. And as for the comforts of life which they afford, they are very inconsiderable when seriously thought upon.

Par. How so?

Min. They are but fading, momentary and unconstant comforts, and unless, we have another comforter beside them, they are very false and deceitful comforts. That thing in man, the true peace and tranquillity whereof is his only true comfort, I mean his conscience, is not capable of receiving any of that so much desirable peace,

without which a man must needs be exceeding miserable, and his own daily tormentor, from any of these things. Suppose a man enjoy them in the greatest plenty, his conscience cannot be thereby assured, that he is any more in God's favour than he that languisheth under the extremity of want. And he that wants them, may, notwithstanding that want, enjoy as much comfort in the sense of God's love, as he that hath them all in the greatest abundance. No man knoweth love or hatred by these things : so that as they are in all respects unsatisfactory ; so can they afford of themselves small comfort.

Par. All this is too true.

Min. Then I hope you see, what a madness it is to love that, which being enjoyed in the fullest measure, wherein any man is capable of enjoying it, can neither stay the appetite, and put an end to its continual and irksome cravings, nor make us any assurance that it will abide with us for any considerable space of time, to reward us for our love to it. But such it is, as we are well assured we shall not be suffered to stay with it long, and whilst we stay, it can be no sure sign or token of our being in his love and favour, whose love alone is that which can make us truly happy, and make any thing we here enjoy in any measure comfortable to us.

Par. That all earthly things are not able to satisfy the desires of man's heart, I must now grant. And I must needs say, that I could never find my self satisfied with them ; but I thought it had been, because I had not a sufficient share of them, and therefore have been always thirsting after more, hoping I might find satisfaction in them at last. Will you now proceed to shew me the *second* thing you promised?

Min.

Min. As these things can do us but a very little good at most, and for a very short time at longest; so are they also such as our grand adversary the devil maketh great use of, and which help him most to mischief and undo us. They are the very instruments of his tyranny, whereby he lordeth it over the souls of men, and holdeth them in perfect slavery to himself. They are the very sinews and strength of his kingdom, as he is the *prince of this world*, John xii. 31. his chief engines of battery, whereby he beateth down all our strong forts; the poisoned baits, wherewith he tempteth and allureth us into his hands; the snares and traps, wherein he intangleth, catcheth, and holdeth us fast; the weapons in the hands of his soldiers, wherewith he persecuteth, woundeth, and destroyeth us. There is no form of temptation which he is master of, wherein they do him not great service against us. There is no art or wile that he dares so much confide in, as in these. It is either, *All these things will I give thee*; or, *All these things will I take from thee*, that he hopes will conquer us. And though he was baffled in the former of these by *Christ* our Saviour, and in the latter of them by righteous *Job*, yet doth he not despair of ruining the greatest part of mankind by the one or other of them. Power and greatness, honour and praise, wealth and pleasures, of all sorts, who is there so ignorant of his devices, as not to know how much he hath always prevailed over the greatest part of mankind, either by promising to give, or threatening to take away these things? Who knows not, that it is by this means that he hath obtained to be *the god of this world*? 2 Cor. iv. 4. And he hath got hereby a family in number far exceeding the *little flock* of Christ.

Par. All this is indeed very visible to any one.

Min.

Min. And the reason of it is plain: The inclinations of our corrupt nature unto these things, give him the greatest advantages against us that he can wish for. He is very vigilant and observant how our pulses beat, and knows how to lay hold on all advantages to ruin us. He hath a very piercing eye, and quickly espieth out our temper, and observing which way our humours and dispositions do bend themselves; out of his great variety of pleasing objects, he is cunning enough to choose that which he knoweth we are aptest to be taken with, and plieth us close with what he seeth us love best, even till he hath got us sure. Now considering this, do you not see more and more, how mad a thing it is to be in love with that which can do us but little good, as it is in our own hand, and will do us very much hurt, as it is in our enemy's hand and management?

Par. I cannot but see it, as you have now laid it before me. What is now the *third* thing you would commend to my consideration?

Min. It is this: That these things being loved by us, are certainly destructive to us. And indeed it is nothing else, but the immoderate love which we bear unto them, that can give any of them, or the devil by them, strength to hurt us. Without this love to them, they are in themselves harmless things; they may, by God's blessing, be very useful and comfortable to us, and even when managed with all the malicious craft of *Satan* himself, ineffectual to do us hurt.

Par. Then I see you do not condemn these worldly things as altogether evil or hurtful.

Min. God forbid I should call any gift or creature of God evil, as it is of him, and all these things are of him. Though (as you have heard) in their own nature they have not that which is able to do us so much good, as the lovers of them would

would fain find in them, because God made them not to this end, that they should be our happiness, and therefore he hath not put any such virtue into them, as can make us happy ; yet inasmuch as they are the good creatures of God, and nothing was made in vain, or for no good use by God, they may be very serviceable to us to many excellent purposes, even to all those for which God made them ; and by his grace we may be instructed and enabled to do much good with them, to the glory of God, and the benefit both of ourselves and others.

Par. Here is some comfort in what you now tell me.

Min. The greater, or richer, or more learned any man is, the higher he is in honour and reputation, the higher his station is in the world, the more invitations and encouragements, the more obligations and opportunities he hath to admire and praise, honour and love that good and bountiful God, from whom all these things do come, and to exercise all the acts of Christian virtue, and to do most good in his generation. As God made not these outward good things, wherein men are wont so much to delight, to be our happiness ; so neither made he them to be useles to us, much less only for the use of the Tempter, or to be his baits, for the insnaring and undoing of men.

Par. I understand that all these things may serve to good uses ; I would now learn wherein the abuse of them most lies.

Min. In our inordinate and immoderate love of them especially ; for by this we idolize them, and set them up in the place of God, expecting to find That in them, which is no where to be found but in God only. And satan abuseth them in making them the instruments of his malice, turning them into temptations to sin, when they
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ought to be helps and encouragements to the exercise of virtue. These are the abuses unto which, by the subtilty of the tempter and our own corrupt affections, they are perverted.

Par. The devil indeed is always too cunning for us.

Min. Yet the devil himself, with all his cunning, cannot do us the least hurt with these things, till we assist him by setting our affections on them.

Par. How doth that appear?

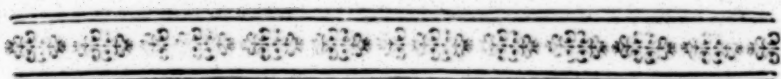
Min. It must be something which we love, and wherein we delight, that must be made his bait, wherewith he can hope to take us. What we hate, we will flee from; and that can be no allurements to us: and what we love not, we will disregard and pass by; that can be no invitation to us. It is therefore our love and delight in the thing wherewith he would tempt us, and nothing else, that can make it a temptation to us. And if so, what a madness is it by our love to these things, to put that poison into them, which of themselves they have not, and whereby alone they can hurt us? Is it not a madness thus to add an edge and sharpness to our adversary's sword, which otherwise is so blunt, that laid on with all the strength he hath, it cannot wound us?

Par. If you will now be at the pains to sum up this argument, and say the substance of what you have at this time told me in as few words as you can, for my easier fixing it in my memory, I will desire no more of you at this time.

Min. Take it thus then in short: It is certainly a very foolish thing, and an argument of great weakness, to love that which in its own nature is unsatisfactory, which, as made use of by our adversary, is very hurtful, or at least dangerous, and which, if it be once loved by us, is certainly pernicious and destructive to us. And then, for
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any man to be content to deceive himself for the love he hath to such a thing as this, must needs be all one, as to be content to deceive himself for the love of his own destruction. I do not say, that any man is in love with destruction, or intends to destroy himself hereby; but in effect it is all one as if he should do so, seeing he loves that, which being loved, must be his ruin, and which, if he had not loved it, could not have hurt him.

Par. I hope I shall remember this, and consider it so well as to do me good.



S E C T. XIV.

The unreasonableness of SELF-DECEIT farther opened.

Par.



Now come to desire you to go on with your discourse of the unreasonableness of Self-deceit, which you began to shew me when I was last with you.

Min. What have you benefitted by what was then told you?

Par. Not a little, I hope; for I see that it is undeniably a great folly, and a most unreasonable thing, to be in love with that which is but of little worth, and to love that best which can do us least good, and may do us much hurt, and being loved, doth certainly bring us to ruin. And yet such are the things, for the love of which we are so ready to deceive ourselves.

Min.

Min. You will be more convinced of this folly, when you shall hear what I have now to add concerning the excellency of those things which we neglect and are content to be deceived in for the love which we bear unto earthly things. For if these things be not worth the love we bestow upon them, and for that reason alone it be folly to love them, then must it needs be granted a greater folly and unreasonableness, to prefer those mean, dangerous, and (when loved) pernicious things before things that are certainly good, and can no way be evil, nor do hurt, but by being slighted; yea, that are the very best that can be, and such most undoubtedly are those, which, for the love of earthly things, we are wont to disregard.

Par. I pray, tell me what these things are which you speak of.

Min. They are things spiritual and eternal, which to consider but little, or to be but a little concerned for, is an argument either of great ignorance in such as understand not the worth of them, or of greater madness in such as, understanding them, can be so much their own enemies, as not to love and prize them above all things else whatsoever.

Par. I desire therefore, seeing they are so considerable, that you would help me a little to discern the true worth of them.

Min. To that end I shall *first* offer them to your consideration by themselves, considered absolutely in their own nature, and so you will see it most abominably absurd not to regard, or not to prize them at the very highest rate imaginable. *Secondly*, I shall commend them to you comparatively with those other worldly things, and so you will perceive, that to slight them so, as to regard or value them less than those things, is an absurdity which can hardly be thought incident to a man.

Par.

Par. Shew me then *first* their worth and excellency absolutely considered.

Min. That I cannot do ; for the things we now speak of are such as are, beyond all expression, yea, or human imagination, transcendently excellent. However, that very little which I can now say of them, will be enough to convince you, that they deserve the height of your love.

Par. I pray, hold me no longer in suspense, but tell me plainly what they are.

Min. To sum up all in one word ; They are GOD : he is the infinite and incomprehensibly comprehensive good, the immense or boundless ocean of goodness, everlasting and inexhaustible. It is he that graciously offereth himself to be enjoyed by that soul of man, which, of all inferior creatures, he hath made alone capable of receiving him, as a most suitable and adequate good, fully commensurate and satisfactory to all its rational desires and capacities.

Par. Is there nothing else you would commend unto me, but God?

Min. Is not he enough? *This is life eternal, that we know him the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent, John xvii. 3.* All those other good things, which are known by the names of *spiritual* and *eternal*, besides God himself, are but the means, methods, or results of enjoying God, and being happy in him. And therefore not to set the highest rate imaginable upon these things, is not to love, but undervalue, and even despise the great and good God, to disregard the perfection of our nature, wherein lieth our happiness or blessedness, and therein our happiness or blessedness itself, and consequently to hate ourselves, and that in the very worst manner that can be, and with the very worst sort of hatred ; a thing so very unnatural, that though many and many

are guilty of it, and do it in effect, yet is it impossible for any man formally to do.

If you know yourself, you know that the reasonable soul is the best part of man, and so much of him, that he were indeed a very beast without it, and no man. This soul in man is a spirit; and as the body cannot subsist, and be nourished and grow to perfect stature without food, and that of its own nature, bodily, so neither can the soul live and prosper without supplies from spiritual things. Is it then unnatural for a man to neglect, or not to love and seek his bodily sustenance, or to famish and pine his body into a skeleton, by abstaining from meat and drink? And shall it not be thought much more unnatural for a man to famish his soul, which alone makes him a man, by a wilful neglect of his food, or want of appetite to it, or what is worse yet, but as common, a squeamish loathing of all spiritual nourishment? If men did as verily believe, that they have souls, as they certainly see that they have bodies, they could not choose but grant this latter neglect by much the most unreasonable and unnatural.

Now, I pray, consider seriously, that these spiritual things, which, for the love of this world and the flesh, men are so apt to slight, have all that in them which can be imagined any way needful to make us most happy, they have a boundless and eternal goodness, all that can be desired by an immortal spirit, as God hath made the soul of man. A spirit it is, which can never cease to be; and if it be not for ever happy, must be for ever unexpressibly miserable; nor can it ever be happy any other way, than by the use and enjoyment of these spiritual things. A spirit again, which tho' it must be for ever happy, or for ever miserable, yet can be neither alone, but the body too must
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deeply share in that happiness or misery, which of them soever proves to be its portion; so that as we provide for the soul, well or ill, we provide in like manner, well or ill, for the whole man. To neglect these things therefore can be in effect no other, than to do that which it seems impossible for any man designingly to do, or consideringly not to abhor the very thoughts of doing, that is, to choose our own destruction, yea, the eternal destruction of ourselves, both souls and bodies.

Par. Be pleased to add what you have to say about these things comparatively considered.

Min. I shall not need to say much; for having seen *first*, what those things are which we so unreasonably love; and *next*, in some measure, what the things are which for those we are apt to neglect, I may trust yourself to compare the one with the other, and judge of the great disparity between them.

Par. I perceive it can be no hard thing to do; yet, if you will do it for me in as few words as you please, it may become more plain to me, and have a deeper impression in my memory.

Min. I shall then only mind you to consider what it is to regard the present pleasure of a mortal, corruptible body so much, as for its sake to disregard both the present and future welfare of an immortal soul: or to prefer a lump of diseased flesh before a pure and heavenly spirit; to value the momentary delights of the former, above the eternal joys of the other; to regard and set most by that part of us whereby we are but in the rank of beasts; and for its sake to despise that part of us wherein we are like unto the angels of heaven, yea, the image of God himself. Think what it is, for the care we have to humour this corrupt flesh for a few days, we know not indeed how few; nay, we know not whether days, or

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not so much as one day, to expose both souls and bodies to an eternity of intolerable torments. To love those things which have no goodness at all in them, but what they have from God alone, and yet for their sakes not to love, but rather hate God himself, from whom all their goodness is derived, and for whose goodness only they may, in any moderate degree, be judged fit objects of our love : to love a dirty earth, and for the love of that to disregard a glorious heaven : for the sake of that which may, and probably must, hurt us, to neglect all things that can truly profit us ; yea, rather than not bestow upon these things that love, which we certainly know will turn them into poison, to lose all things which can conduce to our solid comfort at present, or to our perfect happiness hereafter : If all this be not such a madness as nothing can possibly equal, except it be that of not believing or not considering it as we ought, I leave you to judge.

Par. You may safely do so, or any man else, that is in his right wits. But although it be such a madness to prefer earthly and carnal things before spiritual, and to be so solicitous for this world as to neglect the world to come, yet it seems wisdom to secure to ourselves, as well as we can, our interest in both worlds.

Min. We have indeed an interest in both ; and if we understand aright what our interest in each world is, and take such care of each as is due to it, we do nothing amiss. But as most men understand these interests, and pursue them, it is a very foolish thing to endeavour the securing of them both, which is the *third* of those things which I told you would convince you of the unreasonableness of Self-deceit.

Par. I remember it. But I understand not why you should account it so foolish a thing to attempt this.

Min.

Min. It is a foolish thing for a man to attempt the securing that which he calls his spiritual, and that which he calls his carnal and worldly, interest, at once, because it is a vain thing, and to effect it is impossible. And is it not a madness for a man to be all his life long busy in designing, contriving, and endeavouring to bring about that which he may certainly know, if he will, he shall never be able to compass?

Par. That were a great madness. But that such a thing is impossible to be done, and that all may know it, if they will, I yet understand not.

Min. This all men may know, if they will; yea, they cannot be ignorant of it, except they stupidly shut their eyes against the light, that they cannot at once enjoy the desires of their hearts, as they are sinful and unregenerate men, which is the thing that they call their worldly and carnal interest, and make themselves sure of the favour of God, and the eternal happiness of their souls in his most glorious presence, which is indeed their spiritual interest.

Par. Why do you think so? May not a man labour to reap the comforts of this world and that to come both?

Min. He may use the comforts of this world moderately and piously; he may, by such means as God alloweth, endeavour to secure the same to himself; but he must do this as if he did it not, with a great deal of indifferency, submitting all his desires to God's pleasure, and being as willing to lose them as enjoy them, if it so seem good to God. But to seek a man's pleasure and comfort in these things, as most men do, and call it their interest to do, and to desire heaven too, is all one with that foolish wish of *Balaam*, whereof he was ashamed to utter any more than the one

half; *Let me die* (saith he) *the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*, Num. xxiii. 10. He was ashamed to say, *Give me leave to live the life of the wicked, and let my present conversation be like his*, though this was the thing he desired, otherwise his wish had been blameless. He knew well enough that a holy life shall end in a happy death, and without the life of the righteous there is no ground to hope for the death of the righteous. I pray tell me plainly, what you mean by securing both these two interestts you speak of?

Par. I would enjoy all the good that this world affords; but yet I would do this so, as not to lose my share in the world to come.

Min. That is, you would enjoy all the sinful pleasures and vanities of this world, and after that, the blessedness of heaven; you would fain find out some reason to hope, that you may be both *Epicures* and *Christians*, *swine* and *saints*, flavish drudges to the world and your lusts, and yet the children of God, and the candidates of glory. The absurdity of such hopes or desires, and the grossness of this Self-deceit, will sufficiently appear, by considering the great repugnancy, disagreement and inconsistency of these two, either with each other, or with the nature of man, or with the design of Christianity, or with the end of our hopes.

Par. Why do you say that these two distinct interestts of the flesh and spirit, which we desire, as well as we can, to carry on jointly and together, are inconsistent with each other? To me they seem to agree as well together as the *soul* and *body* do in man.

Min. Compare them a little the one with the other, and you will soon find how ill they can agree, and that they can no more subsist together than heat and cold, or light and darkness, but as
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the one increaseth, the other is abated, as the one is advanced, the other must of necessity fall.

Par. How can you make that appear?

Min. Very easily. *The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other,* Gal. v. 17. These are two such masters, that it is impossible for any man to serve them both at once, but as his love to the one increaseth, so will his hatred to the other increase also; and the more he holdeth to the one, the more he will despise the other, *Matt.* vi. 24. It is as great an absurdity and self-deceit for a man to think of pleasing and humouring them both together, as it would be for one to hope that he may behave himself as a loyal subject to his lawful prince, and at the same time obey the commands of an unjust usurper; or to serve faithfully at the same time two men always contending for the sovereignty in the same kingdom, where whatever the one gaineth the other loseth, and therefore whosoever assisteth the one must needs resist the other. You may as well take the *oath* of *supremacy*, and yet own the *Pope's* power in *England*, therein abjured, as own yourself a Christian, and yet serve the flesh: the *flesh* and *spirit* are the *Cæsar* and *Pompey* in the little empire of man, whereof the one will endure no equal, the other no superior. To mix therefore and blend both interests, carnal and spiritual, in our designs, is to confound light and darkness together; and this will make, at best, but a dusky twilight, which affords a man no more light than will help him to mistake things, and, as he that was yet half-blind under Christ's cure, *to see men as trees*. Or this were the same, as to blend hot and cold, till nothing remain but a lukewarmness, which is nauseous to God. *A kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand,* Mark iii. 24, 25. Diversity of interests

makes a divided people to the disturbance of the publick peace, and bringeth in nothing but confusion and ruin. Though no private interest, honest and good, be to be wholly disregarded, yet is even that no otherwise to be regarded, than in a due subordination and subserviency to the publick welfare, or at least so as to be made yield unto it. Thus, if any man attempt to serve both flesh and spirit, and their contrary interests, he can hope thereby for nothing but confusion at present in his own mind, and at last ruin. Which will yet be clearer, by considering, in the *second* place, how inconsistent this design is with the very nature of man.

Par. Yea, I would see how that can be made out; for it seems to me, that nothing can be more suitable to the nature of man.

Min. Why do you think so?

Par. Because men have bodies as well as souls; and as God hath provided things needful for both, so is it agreeable to our nature to study the interest of both, and to let neither want the provision which God hath made for it.

Min. You say very true; and if we will keep within the bounds which God hath set, and yield to be stinted by him, and be content with his allowance, all will be well. I will endeavour to make you understand what I mean by and by.

Par. I shall attend your leisure.

Min. You say, men have bodies as well as souls. These indeed are two distinct things in man, and considered apart and severally, have very much differing natures. But are not these two the parts of one and the same man?

Par. Yes; for man is but one thing, made up of a body and a soul: they were not made by God to subsist alone, but are naturally disposed to union,

Min.

Min. You say well ; for though the soul can, and in most, if not all, shall, for some time, subsist without the body, yet can it not be without a longing after a re-union with it?

Par. What would you infer from hence?

Min. That neither the body can be happy without the soul, nor the soul completely happy without the body.

Par. That I shall easily grant.

Min. Then you will grant that it is the happiness of the whole man that we should seek ; and that this, next to God's glory, is the great end we drive after so long as we live.

Par. That is also past all dispute with me.

Min. This happiness of the whole man, though it be the happiness of both soul and body, as parts of the whole, yet is to be regarded principally as it respects the soul ; for though neither part of us is to be disregarded in our pursuit after happiness, yet are they to be regarded according to their nature and dignity, the principal part principally, and the less principal but subordinately.

Par. This indeed seems very reasonable.

Min. Which then do you take to be man's principal part?

Par. The soul, without question, is the principal part.

Min. True. 'Tis that whereby we differ from beasts ; and though it be evident that our souls are designed, by our most wise Maker, God, to dwell in bodies, both here on earth, and hereafter in heaven, and therefore must needs have a natural propension and love to our bodies, as fitted for their use, and jointly with them to constitute the same whole, yet are they the more noble. The soul oweth not its life to the body, though in its operations it have great need of it, as the proper instrument, fitted by the wise Creator, for its use.

The body hath a much greater dependence on the soul, owing its life and operations to it, and unable to subsist one moment without it, and so framed in every part of it, as it is apparent, that it is no more than the instrument or habitacle, or, as 'tis called, the *earthy tabernacle* of the soul.

Par. I do not deny any thing of this.

Min. Hence then it is easy to infer, that for a man to endeavour the pleasing and gratifying of the body any farther than as he may thereby minister to the needs, and serve the ends, of the soul, must be very preposterous and ridiculous.

Par. It must so.

Min. 'Tis plain then, that if we will act according to our nature, we are not to set up two distinct interests, one of the body, and another of the soul, but one great interest only, the happiness of both together, as united in one intire man. And then, seeing man's happiness is principally the blessed state of his principal part the soul, to which the body is but subservient, all sensual and bodily pleasures and commodities are no otherwise to be regarded, than with respect and subserviency to the good of the soul. To advance and drive on any interest distinct from that of the soul, and not in subordination to it, or so as not to make it always give place thereunto, is to divide a man's self, and make himself contrary to himself. And he that serves his body as he ought, that is, to enable it to serve his soul, that both may be happy in the service and enjoyment of God, hath but one interest to carry on.

But it will appear yet more absurd, to drive on these two interests, when we consider, that all such immoderate indulgence to the flesh, and fond pampering of it, in allowing it every thing it desireth, is the readiest way to render our bodies quite useless to our souls, inasmuch as nothing doth so
greatly

greatly prejudice or hinder the free and kindly actings of the soul in any of its most proper and noble operations, as riot and luxury, and all intemperance, or indulgence of the body in those things wherein it is most delighted.

That care of the flesh then, which is truly natural or agreeable to the nature of man, can be no more, but what is needful to preserve it in a sound and healthful state, and in a vigorous active temper in such a measure and degree, as may fit it best for its proper offices, as it is the instrument or habitation of the soul. To do this is natural, and commanded by the law of nature, which is also the law of God ; but to do this, is not to set up a distinct interest from that of the soul, but only to take care of the body for the soul's sake. As a man's care to keep his house in good repair, is his own and not his house's interest.

And though we are by nature obliged to take this care of the body, as it is a part of ourselves ; yet to shew us that this care is but subservient to that of the soul, there are some cases wherein the body may and ought to be wholly disregarded and set at nought ; and that is, as often as we cannot at once provide for the safety of both it and the soul : then doth the same law of nature command us to neglect the health, yea, and life of the body, that the soul may escape. Even as a man would pull down his house, or cast his goods over-board into the sea, to save his life : he that would do otherwise, is a fool ; or, as we use to say, penny wise, and pound foolish. Thus, if providence so order it, that a man must suffer or sin, and either give his body to the fire of martyrdom, or his soul to the fire of hell, nature it self, if a man understand what he is, will command him to do the former ; he that thinks otherwise,

wife, will find, when it is too late, that he hath befooled himself.

Par. You have now shewn me my error in this point. Have you any thing more to say of the absurdity of labouring to promote these two interests of soul and body?

Min. I told you, that as men usually conceive of these interests, as if it were their interest to enjoy to the full the things of this world, and to hope at last, notwithstanding, to come to eternal happiness, their design is utterly inconsistent with the great design of Christianity, which is to convert men, and make us of earthy, to become heavenly in the whole frame of our spirits, and course of our lives; which is evident both from the example and doctrine of Christ.

Par. How in his example?

Min. The life of Christ upon earth is to be our pattern. *That mind should be in us, which was in Christ Jesus*, Phil. ii. 5. And nothing is plainer than that his life upon earth was a continual slighting of all the vanities and pleasures of this world. He would not be rich, nor great, nor lead a voluptuous life, but *though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich*, 2 Cor. viii. 9. He was content to be without houses or lands, yea, without so much as any place of his own *where to lay his head*, Matt. viii. 20. To be of *no reputation*, and in the form of a servant, to *humble himself*, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, Phil. ii. 7, 8. He endured the cross, despising the shame, Heb. xii. 2. I need not say more of this, you can find nothing in the whole history of his life and death, that shews in him any the least indulgence to his flesh.

Par. But are we to imitate his example herein?

Min. Observe what he hath taught, and what commands he hath given, and you will soon see that.

that. *He left us an example that we should follow his steps, 1 Pet. ii. 21. And that which we are especially to learn of him, is to be meek and lowly of heart, Matt. xi. 29. This command he hath left us, to deny ourselves, and take up our cross and follow him, Mark viii. 34. To hate father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and our own life also, to come after him, Luke xiv. 27. Our business as Christians is to mortify our members that are on the earth, Col. iii. 5. To have our old man crucified with him, Rom. vi. 6. To crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts, Gal. v. 24. To have the world crucified to us, and ourselves unto the world, Gal. vi. 14. To deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, Tit. ii. 12. Not to be carnally, but spiritually minded, Rom. viii. 6. Not to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. xiii. Accordingly, at the door or entrance into Christ's family, when we are baptized, we are to bid farewell for ever to all worldly and carnal interests, and to make a most solemn vow never to regard them any more. And to assure us, that we shall be no losers by parting with all these things, Christ hath promised, that when we have sold all to follow him, we shall have *treasures in heaven*, Matt. xix. 21. such as endure to eternal life. To hope therefore to reconcile carnal and spiritual, earthly and heavenly interests, is to make to ourselves a new Gospel, to make contradictions friends, to be Christians and no Christians at once.*

Par. I cannot desire you to say any more of a thing so plain; one thing yet remains, that you shew me also how to serve these two interests is repugnant to the end of our Christian hope.

Min. What do you make the end of your hope, as you are a Christian?

Par.

Par. The end of my hope is to be eternally happy in the fruition of objective happiness, which is, as you have taught me, the chief good, that is God.

Min. If you then seriously consider wherein this happiness consists, and withal the natural tendency of all worldly things to indispose us for it, you must needs see enough to make this very clear unto you. You say that it is the chief good, which is God himself, that can afford us, or be unto us that happiness which is the end of our hope ; and how do you hope to attain unto this end ?

Par. By persevering in the sincere profession of Christianity.

Min. If then the carrying on of these two interests be inconsistent with Christianity, as but now I have briefly shewn you, it cannot be consistent with the end of your hope. But let me ask you another question, Can God himself be your happiness if you cannot delight in him, or if you cannot find a full satisfaction to your soul in the enjoyment of him ?

Par. It is certain I cannot be happy in what I cannot delight, or so long as the desires of my soul are unsatisfied, as hath been often said.

Min. Can you enjoy God any otherwise than as he is a most holy and good God ?

Par. I cannot enjoy God any otherwise than he is ; and he must for ever be most holy and good, or he should not be God.

Min. Then you cannot delight in God, except you can delight in holiness and goodness, and if you cannot delight in him, you have granted, that you cannot be happy in him.

Par. I must be delighted with what God essentially is, if I be delighted in him at all.

Min.

Min. If then you be not holy and good in some measure, and have not a desire to be perfectly so, you cannot be happy in God, for unholiness unfits you quite for delighting in him, and so for enjoying him as your happiness, as you have been taught.

Par. That must be confessed.

Min. The soul cannot delight in any thing which is wholly unsuitable to it, and an holy God is altogether unsuitable to an unholy soul; and therefore an unholy soul continuing out of love with holiness, cannot be happy in a most holy God.

Par. But how do the things of this world indispose us for happiness?

Min. What is there that can more indispose the soul for happiness in the enjoyment of perfect holiness, than that which keeps it unholy? And so do the things of this world, for it is for the love men bear to them, that they continue unholy. Yea, the falling off of the soul from the love of God to the love of these things, is its unholiness; and therefore for a man to love these things, and to retain his affections to them all his life long, and yet hope to be happy at last by the enjoyment of God alone in perfect holiness, is most absurd. You cannot be happy in what you cannot love, you do not now love holiness, but those things which keep you unholy, *that is*, which keep you in love with them; and can you still hope to be happy in that which you cannot love, nor so much as endeavour to love? Yea, can you be happy in the loss of all that you can yet love? Or can you hope that God will give you leave to please yourself in sin and unholiness here, and so change your nature and affections all on a sudden by death, that your delights shall be then quite contrary to what they now are? If so, then
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must you suppose that there is no need of any such thing as regeneration, conversion, renovation, repentance or change of heart and life here, but that all your business is only to take your pleasure, such as yourself account so in this world; and to hope when these pleasures have an end, to find new ones in heaven, though you must confess they are such as you cannot yet count any pleasures at all, but rather such as you yet hate with a perfect hatred. I shall add no more of this, but tell you in short, that if you can hope for future happiness, and in the mean time indulge yourself in the pleasures of this world and your flesh, then you must also suppose, that you can, even with a thought, cancel at once both the Law and the Gospel; the one whereof is our rule of serving God by denying ourselves all things that are not agreeable to God's will, how pleasing soever they be to our flesh; the other bringing a pardon for the violation of that law, only upon condition of repentance and a change of heart and life, with a continual study to mortify the flesh and its affections, whereby we are carried after the things of the world.

Par. You have said enough to convince me, that we have but one main interest to look to, and that the other is but to be regarded in subordination to that. That it is this we are concerned to secure, and so it be secured, to rest satisfied, let other things go as it pleaseth God. What now is the next thing you think good for me to be instructed in?

Min. I am, in the *next place*, to shew you the great folly of that pretence which men have for their deceiving themselves, that I mean of silencing or quieting their consciences, which if they should deal plainly and openly with themselves, would be continually reproaching them, and disturbing

flurbing their peace and quietness of mind. And this is the vainest shift of all others.

Par. Whether it be a vain shift or no, I know not; but it seems a very necessary one: for were it not for this, we could never live one minute with any comfort; we should go about our business very distractedly, vexed with the continual lashings of this tyrant called conscience; we could hardly ever make a good bargain for it; nay, we should never sleep quietly in our beds, it would either keep us awake, or trouble us asleep with frightful dreams. And this would be a very uncomfortable life.

Min. So I fear most of us think, and whatever we say for it, our meaning is no more but this, that we cannot enjoy our sins in peace and quietness; *that is*, we cannot destroy ourselves quietly, but our consciences will take our part against ourselves, and be kinder to us than we would have them: they will call us fools for doing foolishly, and wicked for doing wickedly; they will be true and faithful to us, and check us for our unthankfulness and disobedience to God, and for our unnaturalness and cruelty to ourselves; and thus we should never be quiet till we be in a safe way, and out of danger. And for this cause indeed, and no other it is, that we would silence our consciences; which we cannot otherwise do but by Self-deceit, and beguiling ourselves with a vain shew, putting on such a colour and mask of religion in some kind of outside formality, as we may make some sorry shift thereby to persuade ourselves that we are religious indeed, and seem so to ourselves, whilst, God knows, that we are far from being so.

Par. Who is there, that when he finds that he cannot be so good as he should be, would not however, make his life as comfortable to himself as he can?

Min.

Min. No man that is wise would do so, seeing we cannot chuse but see, whenever we will give ourselves leave to consider, how foolish and ridiculous a shift this is.

Par. It were so, if we could but find out any other way to live comfortably.

Min. You cannot find such a way, because you have no mind to find it ; otherwise it is easy enough to find, seeing there is but one way so to do, and God himself hath shewn it us, that is, to live in holiness : and whatever you fancy to yourselves, this way you take can have no true comfort in it.

Par. In quietness of mind there is comfort ; and so long as we can do thus, we are quiet in our minds, and not disturbed with melancholy fears and doubtings, as some conscientious persons are.

Min. In true quietness there is true comfort ; in a false quietness a deceitful comfort : and such is yours. It will be needless to shew you at large the folly of this attempt to quiet thus your conscience, which you cannot do very easily, and which if you do, you ruin yourselves by it. Conscience hath many offices, and for a time indeed, we may make a shift to silence it in them all, even so long as we can find any thing else to divert our thoughts upon : but we must needs see, if the devil have not quite blinded us, the mischief that we thereby do ourselves, whenever we consider what we do. Conscience is a guide to govern and direct us in all our actions by the light which it hath from God, whether it be the natural light of reason, or the supernatural light of divine revelation ; and it would teach us what we are to do, and what we are not to do, as we are men and Christians. But we may both blind and corrupt it, and neither allow it time to consider the
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rule whereby it is to govern us, nor allow it to speak freely and impartially; and thus it may prove a blind guide, and lead us into a ditch: and what shall we gain by that? Is it not a madness for a man that is going a long journey, and must pass through dangerous ways, to put out his eyes, lest he should see and be affrighted by what he shall see in his way? This is our wisdom, we had rather go blindly to hell, than see it and fear it. But do what we can, the eyes of conscience will be one day opened, and it shall see and shew us, to our sorrow, when it is too late for it to guide us in it, the way to life, out of which we are gone blindly to destruction. Conscience is a witness in our breasts, ready to accuse or excuse us according as it sees us act, comparing our actions with the laws of God, whereby we should be governed in our whole course of life. And here again we may find a way to blind and corrupt it as a witness, so as it either shall not be able, or shall not dare to speak the whole truth to our faces: when it would be a faithful monitor, and a trusty friend, privately reproving us for our faults, and warning us to take a safer course; we may stop our ears against it, or by diversions of many sorts, turn away from hearkening to it. But it will one day bear true witness against us to our sorrow; and is it not a madness to chuse rather to have it a witness against us at the judgment-seat of Christ, than a friendly monitor now to prepare us for judgment? *Lastly*, Conscience is a judge to condemn or acquit us in our own hearts for our whole behaviour here in this world towards God, our neighbour, or ourselves, and would judge righteously according to the law: but we may drive off the trial even to the last minute of our lives, but no longer; for after death, be sure of it, if not at death or before, it will give a just sen-

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tence : and is it not a madness to decline its judgment now, when it would only judge us to this end, that we might not be judged of the Lord ; when we know we cannot avoid its final judgment, whereby it shall approve of the condemnation we must incur by not hearkening to it now ? What is it then, to endeavour to muzzle and stop the mouth of conscience, but to vex and exasperate it instead of quieting it, as we pretend, and so render it more keen and eager to fall on us at last with greater fury ? What is it, but to stop the mouth of our guide which would now rightly direct us in the way of life, and to give it thereby more matter of accusation, and to leave ourselves without excuse or evasion, when it shall condemn us for ever ? This is to smother up the fire, that it may break forth more violently and irresistably, and burn unquenchably. This is to feed the worm to greater strength, that it may be able to bite and gnaw everlastingly. I hope I need now to say no more, to shew you the vanity of all those motives whereby men are persuaded to deceive themselves.

Par. You need not indeed be at any more trouble to this purpose : I see it is impossible to hope for any good by it. And this is sufficient to convince me of the folly of it, and therefore I shall not desire you to shew me, as you promised, the evil we must suffer by it, seeing it appeareth sufficiently by what you have already told me.

Min. I thank you for releasing me of that part of my promise ; which yet if you be not satisfied, I am ready to make good. But the evil of it is sufficiently implied in the thing itself, it is *Self-deceit* ; and what can be worse ? He that delights in it, shall find the evil of it when he would not. Now we deceive ourselves out of our duty, at last we shall find that we have in so doing, de-
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ceived ourselves out of all happiness: what now we call our peace and quietness, will then be our torment.

Par. I no way doubt of it, but hell must be the portion of the Self-deceiver.

Min. And not only so, but by Self-deceit he addeth to the torments of hell, and heighteneth his future misery to the utmost. There is nothing worse than to deceive ourselves into vain hopes; for the higher such hopes are now, the more intolerable will the disappointment of such hopes prove at last. If hope deferred, make the heart sick, then hope quite frustrated, must break it. This is that which encourageth us now in our self-deceit, that we hope we shall not be deceived in our expectation, and therefore it must much add to our misery to find, that the more we deceived ourselves, where we had a mind to be deceived, the more we are deceived in what we would not have been deceived. The hypocrite now pleaseth himself with hopes that he shall have all the joys of heaven; but how will he be pleased with himself when he shall find, that this very hope hath brought him into the torments of hell? How will he then curse himself for deceiving himself, when he shall feel by bitter experience, that if he had not deceived himself, all the world could never have made him miserable? When he shall too late call to mind, and cannot by any means get it out of his mind, that all those bitter torments which he shall never come out of, were occasioned by this only thing, that he would not be undeceived? O that sinners, and merely formal Christians, who having a form of godliness, yet deny the power of it, would think upon this in time, and not be any longer *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*, Heb. iii. 13. till God swear that they shall never enter into his rest.


Par. I heartily say, *Amen.* God grant us all grace to serve him more acceptably, by being more faithful to our own souls. I will now go home, and labour to imprint these things upon my heart, and beseech you to assist me by your prayers so to do.

Min. It is my duty so to do ; and God forbid I should cease to pray for you, whilst I am able to pray for myself.



S E C T. XV.

How a man may try if he deceive himself.

Min.  Ome, neighbour, I hope by this time you are sufficiently instructed in the *nature*, the *causes*, the *methods*, the *signs*, and also in the *unreasonableness* of Self-deceit ; and that we have not altogether mis-spent that time that we have bestowed in discouraging of this matter.

Par. No, Sir ; that which I have learned by conversing with you, hath made such an impression upon me, that I hope I shall never forget it ; and I am troubled exceedingly, that I should have lived to this age so near you, and have been told so often by you of the necessity of often consulting our spiritual guides, God's Ministers, and yet should never be persuaded to take this course, whereby I find that I benefit more in an hour, then I should otherwise have done in a year. But, alas ! this very thing we have been so long discouraging

courfing of, and which both I and others made but a laughing matter, when you told us of it openly, is that which hath done me this mischief. I was willing to flatter myself with a conceit, that we were well enough, if we could keep us so; and that to give ourselves any farther trouble, than to go about our business all the week, and come to church on *sundays*, was but a needless thing; and the rather was I persuaded to think so, because I see so few amongst us that do any more.

Min. I heartily bless God, that directed you to take the course that you have done, and that hath hitherto so blessed our endeavours, that you find the benefit of it. Were it needful to say more to convince you of the folly of Self-deceit, I would willingly do it, but I hope it is altogether needless.

Par. By what you have said already, I feel so much of this folly in myself, that I even abhor myself for it. I am very sensible, that to be deceived in things that are plain and obvious to us, such as are the matters of salvation, is a very shameful thing, and a reproach to our nature. And to be deceived in matters of no less concernment than the eternal salvation of our souls, is a very miserable thing, and for that justly most odious. But to deceive ourselves, and to seek out industriously, ways of deceiving ourselves in matters of this nature, must needs be the most unnatural thing in the world: especially when we consider, what our gracious and good God hath done to preserve us from deceit, and what warnings he hath given us in his word to take heed of it; the pains that his Ministers take by his command to undeceive us; how many of our charitable friends and acquaintance God stirreth up ever and anon to admonish us; the abundance of

means and opportunities which by God's providence we have of rightly informing ourselves in the saving truth ; the joy that would be among the holy angels of heaven to see us walk in safe paths ; and finally the pleasure that the cursed devils take to see us so busy in doing their work for them, and destroying ourselves ; when, I say, I consider these things, I cannot but wonder how both I and others should all this while continue so strangely stupid, that nothing of all this could sooner prevail with us to so natural a work as to take a little more care of ourselves.

Min. I am glad to find you so ready in these considerations. However, this were enough, that all our present comfort and future happiness depends upon our being undeceived. So that they who think it not all one to them, whether they be saved or damned eternally, but are so rational as to think it concerns them to make their calling and election sure, must needs be very cautious how they expose themselves to be deceived. Seeing now you are thus far convinced, what is it that you would next desire my assistance in ?

Par. I think it is my great concern to be able (as far as it is possible for me to discern it) to judge aright of my present condition, and whether I do yet in any thing that is essential to Christianity deceive myself. That therefore which I now desire is, that you would help me to try myself in such things as you think most needful for me to be well assured of as a Christian.

Min. I very well approve of your desire ; for all this our discourse which we have hitherto had, will be useless without this. It is not the understanding of these things that will do us any good, except we apply them to ourselves, and labour to come thereby to the knowledge of ourselves. I shall therefore chearfully afford you my best assistance

sistance herein : neither shall I need to deal with you as with an atheist, that owns no God, or as with a heathen or infidel that owns not Jesus Christ and his Gospel. You use to meet with others in the publick place of God's worship, at least sometimes, and there hear God's word, and are willing to be called and accounted a Christian ; and I must suppose, that either you think you are so already, or you are desirous to be so. And farther yet, I must suppose that you therefore desire to be a Christian, because you believe that all who are so indeed, shall at the end of this life be saved by the merits of that same Jesus, whose religion they do profess. I will therefore only ask you a few easy questions by the way, which when you have answered, we shall come to what we aim at. Are you convinced that you are a sinner ?

Par. I was born a sinner, and have spent most of my life in sin.

Min. What do you then deserve, as you are a sinner ?

Par. I deserve nothing of God but wrath and everlasting punishment.

Min. By what means do you hope to escape that punishment ?

Par. I know of no way left me to escape it, but one ; that is by being a disciple of Jesus Christ, or a good Christian.

Min. I hope you mean, by being so in good earnest, and not in jest.

Par. I am not so foolish as to think that Christ will be my Saviour merely because I am willing to be called after his name, and to make some shew of honouring him by an outward profession of his religion. I cannot be so mad as to think that Christ will save me for being an hypocrite, and dissembling with him.

Min. No, sure ; if any man can be so unreasonable as to hope he may deceive Christ with fair words and specious shews, and get salvation by him by endeavouring to deceive him ; he is a more gross Self deceiver than I hope any of you yet are. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked*, saith the apostle, Gal. vi. 7. This were like the sin of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, Acts v. who hoped to deceive the *Holy Ghost* with a lye. I suppose you, then, a man that do not purposely go about to deceive God, but think that you serve him acceptably, though it may be you do not.

Par. This is the thing I now desire your help in, that I may understand whether I do so or no, though I am apt to hope the best of myself.

Min. I will give you the best assistance I can : yet, by the way, I must tell you one thing, the ignorance of which may do you much hurt. It is this, That a man may much easier know when he is no good Christian, than he can know that he is so. A man can much easilier discover vice in himself, than he can do true virtue. The apostle, Gal. v. 19. speaking of *the works of the flesh*, tells us, *they are manifest* : but when, v. 22. he speaketh of *the fruit of the Spirit*, he doth not say that this is also manifest. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ; who can know it ?* Jer. xvii. 9. It is very hard indeed, for a man to know the sincerity of his own heart, and therefore very hard for him to be sure that he is a sincere and good Christian. But there are many and many things so inconsistent with the sincerity of Christianity, that it is easy for any man, by seeing them in himself, to know that he is no sincere Christian. My chief business therefore with you now, is to shew you how you may know yourself to be no good Christian, and not how you may certainly know that you are one.

Par.

Par. This is very uncomfortable ; and I cannot yet see what better I can be for trying whether I deceive myself or no, if still I may be deceived, and think myself a good Christian, when I am not so.

✓ *Min.* Yes, you may be much the better for it, as I shall endeavour to make you understand by and by. Now let me tell you these things in order to it. Though it be necessary, in order to your salvation, that you be a sincere Christian, yet is it not necessary, in order to the same end,
4 that you should certainly know you are so. I deny not but it is possible to know this, and I believe that some have known it ; and farther yet I think him to be no good Christian, and too careless, both of pleasing God, and of his own soul, that doth not endeavour to attain to as great a measure of knowledge herein as he can ; but that he must certainly know his own sincerity, or come short of salvation, I think can never be proved.
Next, Though the sincerity of a man's heart is not so easily discerned as that every Christian can certainly know it, yet are there many things whereby a man may easily discern the insincerity of his heart, and unsoundness of his Christian profession, and these things it highly concerneth us to take notice of. And now you may easily see what good you may get by the tryal and examination of yourself. You may, by what you discover in yourself, certainly know that you are no good Christian ; and knowing this, you will be the more humbled, and be persuaded to repent and amend your life, and become a new man, and to come unto Christ in earnest prayer, crying out, *Lord, save me, or else I perish.* And if, on the other hand, you find in yourself what the Gospel of Christ requireth in all Christians, though you attain not to a certain knowledge of your sincerity,

rity, but only to fair probabilities of it, you are to comfort yourself therein, blessing God for what you find in yourself, and *forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*, Phil. iii. 13, 14. and *working out your salvation with fear and trembling*, Phil. ii. 12. It is uncomfortable to a man to think himself no sincere Christian, when he really is so, as many melancholy Christians do; but (as I told you before) it is not so dangerous. But to be confident of a man's self, and to think himself a good Christian, when he is not, this brings in a deceitful comfort, and destruction in the end of it. This one thing however you may be sure of, that the best sign that any man can have of his sincerity, is his great care and pains with himself to be so.

Par. Here is some comfort again. I must, I see, take all the care and pains I can to try myself, and to cast away what I find amiss, and to labour after what is wanting, and to strive after perfection, and leave the issue to God, hoping, that where he hath begun a good work in me, he will also perfect it, and that he will not be wanting to me, whilst I am not wanting to myself.

Min. This is indeed your Christian duty; and if you use all diligence in it, you do well. Now I will endeavour to satisfy your desire, and shew you *first* more generally, how you may know whether you deceive yourself, in thinking yourself a sincere professor of Christianity; and next, how you may try yourself more particularly in those three principal graces of *Faith, Hope, and Charity*; and this, I hope, will be sufficient.

Par. Begin where you please with me, and ask me what questions you think good, I will answer them

them truly and fully to the best of my understanding.

Min. You profess yourself to be a Christian. Now I must tell you, that either this is not the Gospel of Christ, which we take to be his Gospel, or very many of you, who call yourselves Christians, are no Christians. The Name of Christian is become so common in all your mouths, that, I am afraid, you never heed what it signifies, when you call yourselves by it; and that most of you, when you say, *I am a Christian*; mean no more, than you do when you say, *I am a man*, or *I am a woman*.

Par. What reason can you have to think so of us?

Min. If you meant any thing more by it, methinks using it so commonly as you do, you should sometimes think with yourselves, whence, and for what you are so called, and should begin to be ashamed to live so unanswerably to that name. Would not a man be ashamed to call himself a shoemaker, when all men knew that he understood nothing of his trade? yea, would he not think himself abused when others called him so? Besides this, is it not usual to say, *Every Christian soul*, when you mean no more but *every man* or *woman*? And when you say, *He used me not like a Christian*, or, *This is not meat for Christians*, and the like, mean you any thing else but, as if you should say, *He used me not like a man*, or, *This is not man's meat*? As if it were all one with most of you to be a *man* or *woman*, and to be a *Christian*.

Par. We thus use to speak indeed, and in no other sense than you say; but that is not because we take a *Christian* to signify no more but a man or a woman, but because all, both men and women, amongst us are *christened* or *baptized*, and so

so are indeed *Christians* as well as men and women.

Min. You give the true reason, why the name is so commonly used ; but still, I fear, this reason of it is either little thought on by most of you, or that it is not a sufficient reason, why you should still call yourselves by that name.

Par. Are we not all Christians, who have been baptized ?

Min. I wish you were ; for we are all engaged as solemnly as men by any act can be, to be Christians. But O, how happy would the world be, if all that have been engaged so to be, were so indeed ! I hope you do not think that to be sprinkled by the hand of a *minister* with a little *water*, and with a certain form of words, which *Christ* hath commanded to be used in the administration of that sacrament, doth, without any more ado, make us *Christians*.

Par. If it did, it were a very easy thing indeed to be a Christian.

Min. And yet how many are there among us, who have nothing in the world but only this Baptism, and their having been born of Christian parents, and those parents just such Christians as their children ; or, it may be, thus much more, that they live among Christians, and outwardly, in most things, do as they see them do ; how many, I say, have no more but this to shew, why they should be accounted Christians ?

Par. It may be, there are some such among us, but these are only of the worst sort of professors ; and you are not to judge of the most by those few, for, I hope, they are not many.

Min. The worst sort are they, whose ordinary conversation shews them, notwithstanding their baptism and profession, to be the children of the devil, and wholly led by him : Nay, even of those

those who are accounted the better sort of Christians amongst you, and such as by the neighbourhood are called very good men and women, I now speak, as well as of the rest, that openly proclaim in the streets their impiety: too many even of this better sort are yet no better at all, nay, I fear, much worse than very good heathens.

Par. Yes, sure, they have some knowledge of Christ, and of his Gospel, which the best of heathens had not.

Min. They have so; and this renders them worse than they, because they hold the truth in unrighteousness, and live not according to their knowledge, or means of knowledge, which God hath given them; and for this cause it shall be more tolerable for the heathens in the day of judgment than for them.

Par. They not only know the truth, but do their duty accordingly, so that all the neighbourhood applaud them for their doings as very good Christians.

Min. That you may not deceive yourself in this, wherein so many are deceived, I must tell you, that you may come up very near to the life and conversation of a good Christian, as far as others are able to judge, and yet want the heart of a Christian.

Par. What can be wanting in the persons we now speak of to shew that they are Christians in heart, I see not. They are very good and sweet-natured persons, very kind, very loving, very free, very patient, very lowly-minded, they delight to do good among their neighbours, they cannot endure to be seen in any unseemly action, they are very chaste and sober, and, as far as we can see, every way virtuous, and what would you have more?

Min.

Min. You do well to judge as charitably as you can of all, it is your duty so to do ; only you must take heed, lest you think too well of yourself for no better reasons than you think well of others ; for all this that you have commended in your neighbours, is far short of enough to prove a man to be a good Christian ; all this may be no more but their natural temper, and even short of morality.

Par. Yea, but these I speak of, are very knowing in the Scriptures, and believe the Gospel, and own Jesus Christ to be their Saviour, and delight much in hearing and reading God's word, and also pray very often. And such sure are more than moral men.

Min. If they do all this, we are to hope well of them, and to account them Christians, because we cannot see into their hearts ; but still such may be far short of good Christians, though many hundreds deceive themselves with a strong conceit that they are good Christians, with much less colour for it, than all this amounts to.

Par. I do not yet well understand what more than this is needful.

Min. When we have a little more inquired into the nature of the Christian religion, and seen what it is, without the knowledge whereof we can never avoid Self-deceit, I hope you will see that much more is needful. How were you admitted into the society of Christ's disciples ?

Par. By baptism.

Min. Is not baptism, whereby you were entered into the church of Christ, the sacrament of *regeneration* or new-birth, *Tit. iii. 5.* And is it not a *being buried with Christ into his death, and a rising again to newness of life, that we profess in baptism ? Rom. vi. 4.* Are not they that are baptized, said to *put on Christ ? Gal. iii. 27.*

Par.

Par. This I must grant, seeing I read it in the word of God.

Min. It followeth then, that if any man think that he is a good Christian by being baptized, and be not born again, he doth but deceive himself.

Par. I hope I am born again of the spirit of God, otherwise I could have no hope of entring into the kingdom of God.

Min. If you think that you are born again, and be not changed from carnal to spiritual, you do but deceive yourself; for as *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*, so also *that which is born of the spirit is spirit*, John iii. 6.

Par. I hope also that I am changed from a carnal to a spiritual man.

Min. If you think that you are spiritual, and born of the spirit, and yet live after the will of the flesh, and mind the things of the flesh, you deceive yourself, for *these two, the flesh and the spirit, as you have heard before, are contrary the one to the other*, Gal. v. 17. And *he that is in Christ, or a Christian, walks not after the flesh, but after the spirit*, Rom. viii. 1. And *to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace*, v. 6. It is then a fond deceit in men to fancy themselves good Christians for this only, that they have been baptized, whilst they find not in themselves the power of the spirit over-ruling and subduing the lusts and desires of the flesh. You profess moreover, that in baptism you were buried with Christ. Do you think you are so in indeed?

Par. I hope so.

Min. You are to see what reason you have to hope so: if you have good reason to think so, then you do not find yourself alive to the commanding power of sin. If when it commands, you are yet lively and active in obeying it, you are
 †
 deceived

deceived in supposing yourself buried with Christ. *He that is dead, is freed from sin, Rom. vi. 7. We should be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God, ver. 11. And sin must no more reign in our mortal bodies, that we should obey it in the lusts thereof, v. 12. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin, v. 6. Whosoever then is born of God, doth not commit sin, 1 John iii. 9. But being buried with Christ, we are also risen with him, and the life that we now live, we live by the faith of the Son of God, Gal. ii. 20. Yea, Christ being formed in us, Gal. iv. 19. it is no longer we that live, but Christ that liveth in us. Being risen with Christ, we are to set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth, Col. iii. 1, 2. Our treasure must be laid up in heaven, and our hearts must be there with it, Matt. vi. 20. and our conversation must also be in heaven, Phil. iii. 20. We are no longer to be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of the spirit of our mind, approving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, Rom. xii. 2. Have you thus indeed put on Christ in baptism?*

Par. I wish I could say so truly.

Min. If you have, then you make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, Rom. xiii. ult. But you are become a new creature, 2 Cor. v. 17. created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath ordained that we should walk in them, Eph. ii. 10. O how grossly do all they deceive themselves, who, having been baptized, think themselves Christians, and yet never find any such change or renewing of mind as this in themselves! nay, are so far from endeavouring to express or copy out the life of Christ in their own lives, and living so, as the world may see Christ lively represented in them as in his living images, that their chief
care

care is for the flesh, and their chief delight is still in pleasing the flesh, and their main business and employment is in worldly and carnal things. That we may yet keep close to that, wherein we are so apt to deceive ourselves, our baptism: In whose name were you baptized?

Par. I was baptized in the name of *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, our *Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier*.

Min. I am willing to believe, that neither you, nor any other, can be so ignorant as to imagine, that to be baptized in the name of the *Father*, the *Son*, and the *Holy Ghost*, is no more but to have these three names pronounced over you when you are baptized.

Par. No; we are better taught than so, and have learned that we were by baptism, as by a sacrament instituted by Christ himself for that purpose, solemnly dedicated and given up to the worship and service of the ever-blessed *Trinity* in *Unity*, ingaging to profess the faith of *one God* in *three Persons* all the days of our life; and so doing, we hope to be saved.

Min. And so doing, you need not doubt but you shall be saved. All the danger lieth in deceiving yourselves, and thinking you do so, when you do not. Baptism is the solemnization of a most gracious and sacred *covenant*, whereinto God is pleased, through Christ's mediation, to admit us sinners to enter with himself, wherein he promiseth to be our God, and to own us and bless us as his adopted children in Christ Jesus, and we engage ourselves to take him alone for our God, and to behave ourselves towards him as dutiful children all the days of our life.

Par. I thank God I understand that which you say of entering into covenant with God, and take this true God, the *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, for

my only God, and therefore I trust he will be a gracious God to me.

Min. I shall be glad if you do so indeed; and I pray God that you may not deceive yourself in thinking you do so. Do you well understand in what relations you are to acknowledge God to be your God, and how to behave yourself towards him considered in all those relations?

Par. I do not well understand the meaning of your question; when you have made it plainer to me, I will answer as well as I can.

Min. You understand, I hope, that God is your *Creator*, and that you are his creature, the work of his hand. This is God's first *relation* to you.

Par. So far I understand you well, and so I own him to be.

Min. Do you indeed behave yourself towards him as your Creator?

Par. What mean you by that?

Min. Do you consider that you are nothing but what he made you to be, that you have nothing but what he gave you, and that you can hope for nothing but what he provideth for you?

Par. All this I know and acknowledge.

Min. Then you must acknowledge that you are not your own, but God's; and whatever you have is no farther your own, than he allows of it. *We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture, for he made us, and not we ourselves*, Psal. c. 3.

Par. I acknowledge all this.

Min. If you acknowledge God to be your *owner*, and that neither you yourself, nor any thing you have, is your own, but his; then your duty to God in this relation, is not to use yourself, nor any thing you have, as absolutely your own, or at your own pleasure, but to resign yourself willingly, and all you have, to him, to be used as he pleaseth, and to be disposed of as he shall order,

der, without any grudging or muttering at any thing which he doth with you, or layeth upon you, or taketh from you; but to be well content that he shall use his right, and do what he will with his own. Can you chearfully part with a child, or lose all your cost and pains in plowing and sowing in an unseasonable year, and bear the death of your cattle by a murrain? Can you account your meat, and drink, and money, and every thing to be God's, and use none of them any otherwise than he gives you leave, or commands you? Can you bear sickness, or any thing else, that befalls you by God's providence, patiently and submissively, saying, It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good?

Par. This, I confess, is a very hard lesson; I never yet well conned it, nor can I say, that I practise it.

Min. Yet, if you do not practise it, or labour not to be very perfect in it, you deceive yourself, in saying you have taken the Lord for your God, for so he is your owner, and all things are his; and you do not acknowledge his right, if you leave him not freely to do with you and all things what he will. I ask you again, What did God make you?

Par. God hath made me a man after his own image, a creature with life, and a power to act, and a will to resolve and chuse, and an understanding to see, and consider, and to judge of things, and to direct my will in its choice for the best.

Min. You say well; and thus God is not only your *Maker*, but your *Father*, and your *Governor*: for as he that made all things must needs have a right to rule over all things, so he ruleth and ordereth all things according to their several natures, disposing of them to such uses as he hath

by creation fitted them for ; and therefore he governeth *men* according to that rational nature which he hath given them. His will is the law of all things, and men being fitted to understand his will, when revealed, he hath therefore revealed unto them his will, by which they are to be governed ; and this is another relation of God to you.

Par. This I also understand.

Min. Then you must acknowledge that you are not to be ruled by your own will or desire, nor to be your own chuser and carver what you have a mind to do, but as a dutiful child, and obedient subject, must submit yourself to God's government.

Par. I do readily acknowledge this.

Min. Have you then learned what the will and laws of God are ? And is it your greatest care to obey and keep them ? Do you freely submit your own wisdom, and will, and desires to the wisdom and will of God your Governor and Father ? And are you best pleased with his ordering of you in all things ? Doth no fear of loss or suffering, no hope of worldly gain or pleasure, prevail with you to act contrary to the laws of God ?

Par. Here again I must confess myself at a loss.

Min. Yet, if you do not resolve all this, and endeavour it by all means, you have not taken the true God for your God, for so he is your absolute Sovereign, King and Father. Let me once again ask you, Did not he, who made all things, make all the goodness that is in every thing ?

Par. That must needs be.

Min. Is not he, that is the author of all goodness, more good than all things else whatsoever ?

Par. He must needs be so.

Min.

Min. Is not he also, that is the Author of all goodness, the Giver of all the good things that you enjoy?

Par. Neither can that be denied.

Min. Then are you to own God as your *Benefactor*, to whose goodness and bounty you owe all the good you have; and he is the *chief good* wherein alone you can be happy; and here you see a third *relation* of God to you.

Par. Yea, and that a most comfortable one, which I most thankfully acknowledge.

Min. But have you learned how to behave your self towards God in this relation? Do you use none of his good gifts without hearty thankfulness to him? And thankful you are not, if you use them contrary to his will and commands, or to ill ends. Do you thirst after God, as after the only original and supreme good, of infinite, unexhaustible and everlasting goodness? Do you esteem nothing at all good in comparison with him, or not in subordination to him, or otherwise, than as you may taste his goodness in it, or by it be helped to serve him, and enjoy him? Do you desire, seek, love, rest and delight in nothing without him, in nothing but him, in him, though all things else fail, and do you make his honour the end of all you do?

Par. I dare not confidently say that I have done all this.

Min. Then have you not taken God for your God; for as God he is your great Benefactor, and should be your end in all things: yet hitherto I have pozed you no otherwise than I would do an understanding heathen (saying that I have mentioned the Trinity of Persons) for all this the light of nature dictates to be our duty as we are men only. If we fall short in this, what can we hope for?

Par. We hope for mercy through Christ.

Min. You say well; for we are sinners, and cannot live according to the law of nature, but must have a pardon, or we cannot be saved; and this pardon is purchased by Christ, and we may have it; but it must be by keeping covenant with God, even this same covenant into which we entered at our baptism, and by that we stand obliged to all that you have heard, though not in perfection of duty, yet in sincerity of hearty endeavour. How then do you consider God in this new covenant of grace?

Par. I look upon him as my offended Governor, who might justly execute the sentence of eternal death upon me for violating the law of nature, whereby I have quite forfeited all that right to happiness with God, which he at first gave unto man, and am fallen under the curse and wrath of God most deservedly. I say, I consider God as my offended Governor, who yet of his mere goodness is pleased to pity me and to offer himself thus far reconciled unto me through the death of his Son, as to offer me a free pardon of all my sins.

Min. Upon what condition may you have the benefit of this pardon?

Par. *Conditions!* I wonder you should talk of our coming to conditions or terms with God for his pardon, it is a *free* pardon, and comes of his *free* grace.

Min. I wish you deceive not yourself in this. What do you mean by saying it is a free pardon? Is it this, that God requireth nothing of us in order to our receiving the benefit of this pardon?

Par. Nothing of us as a condition, but only that we receive it by *faith*, and be thankful for it.

Min. On what must you ground this *faith*, that you are pardoned?

Par.

Par. On the word of God, and the promises therein given us through Jesus Christ.

Min. Are these promises of pardon absolute promises, implying or expressing no condition on our part?

Par. None at all, but only that we *believe*; for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life, John iii. 16. And he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved, Mar. xvi. 16. So then we have nothing to do, but to believe that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and that God, for his sake, hath pardoned us.

Min. God hath no where in his word commanded us to believe that we are pardoned, but to believe in Jesus Christ, through whom we may be pardoned. Neither hath he promised any where that we shall be saved, if we believe that we are pardoned; but if we believe in Jesus Christ his Son: and this is another thing. Therefore is this a fancy of your own, and a Self-deceit, which I would advise you to beware of, as you love your life.

Par. That is strange; Are we not justified by faith alone, as Abraham was?

Min. Yes, we are; but you mistake Faith for quite another thing than it is, for justifying faith is not a believing that we are pardoned.

Par. Then I am deceived indeed. But how will you make this appear?

Min. Do you believe that all other parts of God's word are true, no less than those which promise eternal life to him that believeth?

Par. I certainly believe, that every part of the word of God is true.

Min. Must not then those places of promise to the believers be so interpreted, as they may not contradict any other part of God's word, but

that every part of it may be acknowledged to be true?

Par. No doubt of it; for if one part contradict another, both parts cannot be true.

Min. But if you so interpret the promises made to faith, as to take faith to be a belief only that our sins are pardoned, and that no other condition is required of us, but to believe, that then other parts of Scripture must needs be false; and if you once be forced to grant that any part of it is false, you can have no certainty that any other part of it is true, and so shall have nothing left to ground your faith upon.

Par. That were to run myself upon a rock, whence I could never be brought off safe.

Min. Such a rock you must be dashed against, if you persevere in your opinion of justifying faith, which I shall shew you in a very few words. What think you of such places as these: *Except ye repent, ye shall all perish*, Luke xiii. 3. *Christ will come to take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel*, 2 Thess. i. 8. Not to trouble you with more such places now, because I shall have some occasion anon to name many more, what think you of all those where you are told, that they who continue in such and such sins, cannot enter into the kingdom of God? Can these be true, if to believe that we are pardoned, and that God requires nothing of us as a condition, without which we shall not be pardoned and saved, be true justifying faith? But I shall have occasion to lay this more plain before you afterward. I shall now only shew you how you deceive yourself in your notion of free grace, and a free pardon.

Par. I shall be very willing to see my errors, and correct them: but you cannot persuade me, that we are not *justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ*, Rom. iii. 24.

Min.

Min. I do not go about to persuade you of that, but to shew you how to understand that *free grace* whereby you are justified or pardoned : and I will do it by an easy similitude. Suppose yourself guilty and condemned of high-treason, and that you have nothing to plead for yourself why the sentence of death should not be executed upon you : by what means can you hope to escape death ?

Par. By no other, but the king's mercy and gracious pardon.

Min. Suppose you want friends or money to procure such a pardon, neither have any worth or merit, or are able to do any considerable service, which you may plead for yourself, to move the king to grant you his pardon ; what hope then can you have ?

Par. None at all ; but only in the king's good nature and clemency.

Min. Suppose therefore, in the next place, that the king is, of his own good nature, inclined to pity you, and shew you mercy ; but he would also secure the honour of his government, and not by granting pardons too easily seem to neglect his laws, and the welfare of his people, and to encourage others to offend in hope of impunity ; and hereupon resolves upon this expedient. He calls to him the prince, his son, and tells him how much he pitieth you, and how willing he is to pardon you, so that any person of worth and dignity would intercede for you ; and hereupon the prince himself is pleased to intercede for you, and to pay a great ransom for your pardon, which is presently granted and sealed, and your life granted to the prince, and he tenders it unexpectedly to you, when you look for nothing but present death ; Will you not call this a free pardon ?

Par.

Par. Yes, certainly ; and it comes of the king's free grace and goodness.

Min. Thus far we are all freely pardoned by God, and ought to believe that his pardon is granted for his son's sake, and sealed in his blood, the ransom of our lives, and the pardon is put into his hands, and he graciously tendereth it to us in the Gospel.

Par. Is not this it that I said ? And what have we to do but to believe him, and thankfully receive it ?

Min. You are too hasty. In the case you were now supposed to be in, would you think it reasonable to hope, that as the king was willing to pardon, so he should also be willing you should play the traitor again, and order the prince to give you your pardon into your hands, and tell you, so you believed that you had your pardon, you might now do what you will ; for as long as you believe that you are pardoned, you are safe ?

Par. No, sure ; you cannot imagine I should be so absurd, as to hope for so unreasonable a thing. I should expect that the prince, when he gave me my pardon, should charge me to become a new man, and behave myself henceforward as a good subject, obeying the laws of the kingdom, and honouring the king. And I must confess, that I should think this a very free and gracious pardon, and that I should deserve all possible severity, if I should abuse the king's mercy, and the prince's love and bounty to encourage me to play the traitor again.

Min. You see then, that a pardon may be free, and granted of free grace, and yet imply some conditions, without the performance whereof, a man cannot in reason expect the benefit of it. And now I hope you will no more be startled at the question I asked you, but answer it. Upon
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what condition then, may you have the benefit of that pardon which God hath granted us through Christ?

Par. I perceive your question is no way unreasonable; but I know not how to answer it otherwise than I have done. The only condition I know of, is Faith.

Min. Faith indeed, in that sense of it, wherein it is frequently used in the scripture, especially when we are said to be justified by it, is the only condition of our pardon; but so faith implies the whole duty of a Christian, that is repentance of sin, and obedience to the Gospel of Christ, whom God hath made our king and governor; having given him all power both in heaven and in earth. The condition therefore upon which you may have the benefit of God's pardon, is in short, that you henceforth behave yourself as a dutiful subject to God in Christ. And this you said before, though you seemed not to understand it, when you told me from the scripture, that *he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.*

Par. What do you then take to be the sense of those words?

Min. The plain sense of them is this; that whosoever believeth the Gospel, when it is preached unto him to be true, and so is convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, sent by him into the world with a pardon for all them that will submit to his government, and vow allegiance to him; and being persuaded of this, do by baptism, the sacrament which he for that end hath instituted, bind themselves to obey him in all things that he commandeth; and accordingly persevere so doing, shall, notwithstanding all their former misdemeanors and offences, be saved by him.

Par. I must confess, that I builded so much upon the word *believeth*; that I did not at all consider

der the import of that addition, *and is baptized* ; but I see my error.

Min. Baptism is for the remission of sins, and in that sacrament our pardon is given us, upon condition, that as we are sinners, we do repent of our sins, and take God for our God, offering himself unto us to be our merciful Father in Christ. We own him (as was said before) in all his relations of our Owner, our Governor, and our Benefactor ; and all this in Christ our Saviour, whom the Father hath sent in his name. We give ourselves unto him as his own purchased possession ; *for we are not our own, we are bought with a price*, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. even the price of his most precious blood, 1 Pet. i. 19. that we should glorify God both in our body and our spirit, which are God's. We must resolve to trust unto nothing for our pardon and salvation, but God's mercy, through his merits ; to hearken unto God, in him the great prophet and teacher of his church ; to submit to his sceptre, and obey his commands, as the great King set at God's right-hand in all power and majesty ; to hope to be brought to *his Father*, and *our Father*, our eternal happiness, no other way than that which he hath shewn us in his doctrine and example. I now ask you once again, Have you indeed taken God the *Holy Ghost*, to be your God ?

Par. I have so ; I acknowledge him to be the *third Person* in the *Trinity*, and *one God* with the *Father* and the *Son* ; and so I worship him as the true God.

Min. So far good : But have you considered well the work and office of the *Holy Ghost*, and submitted yourself unto him therein ?

Par. What mean you by that ?

Min. You know you are by nature a sinner, unholy, and blind, and weak ; and naturally you neither

ther see, nor love, nor can walk in the ways of God, which lead to life. It is the *Holy Ghost's* office to guide you, and to sanctify, and to strengthen you. Have you now taken the *Holy Ghost* to be your *Guide*, and *Sanctifier*, and *Strengthenener*?

Par. I hope I have done so.

Min. Then you do in good earnest apply yourself to the means which the *Holy Ghost* useth to these purposes, *prayer*, the *word* and *sacraments*; and desire nothing more than to be enlightened, and purified, and confirmed in grace and knowledge, in perfect love and holiness.

Par. It were well if I could say I do so.

Min. If you do not, then have you not taken the Lord for your God; for as such, he is not only your *Maker*, and your *Redeemer*, but also your *Sanctifier*; and sanctified you must be by him before you can come to the joyful sight and enjoyment of God in perfect love and holiness: as you will, I hope, afterwards be more fully convinced, if you be not by what you have heard already.

Par. God help us! how miserably do most of us deceive ourselves, in thinking we are made Christians by being baptized, whilst we never yet so much as once entered into a serious consideration of the meaning of baptism, or what it signifies, or obligeth us unto.

Min. If our parents do heartily dedicate us by baptism, whilst we are children, to the blessed Trinity, I know no more that can be done for us in order to our salvation in that age, because being infants, we are capable of no more, neither doth God expect from us what we have not, any rational act, whilst we have not the use of reason. So long therefore we are to be accounted Christians, because we have been baptized. But when

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we grow up, and our reason and understanding ripeneth with our age ; and as we begin to use our reason about other things, so God expects we should use it about the chief thing, and be *trained up whilst children, in the way wherein we should go, and from which we are not to depart when we are old*, Prov. xxii. 6. And to be *brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, Eph. vi. 4. We are to be taught what was done for us by others, and what obligation lies upon us to perform the promise made by others in our name ; and we are to consider it, and resolve upon it, and act for ourselves as we become able so to do. So that *three* ways we may here deceive ourselves by taking ourselves to be good Christians, because we were baptized : *First*, If being baptized, we do not apply ourselves with all care and industry to the learning our christian faith and duty. *Secondly*, If being taught it, we rest there, thinking it enough to understand it, but do not deliberately consider it, nor take the engagement upon ourselves by a proper act of our own, firmly resolving to keep our baptismal vow. *Thirdly*, Having done something of this, if we do not make conscience of keeping it, and doing as we then promised throughout the whole course of our lives.

Par. I cannot but wonder how we should be so regardless of all this, most of us, even as though we were no way concerned in it. For most of us, notwithstanding this solemn dedication of us to God, do live all our life long as if we were still our own, yea, or indeed the devil's, rather than God's.

Min. Consider then, what I say ; Have you at any time seriously, understandingly and resolvedly, of your own free choice, and by your own voluntary act, resigned yourself wholly unto Christ, to be governed by him, resting in his will, what-

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ever it is ? And do you attend daily on the Holy Ghost, in using the means of sanctification, longing to be made more holy, and thereby enabled to serve God better here, and fitted to enjoy him eternally ? When did you go aside privately by yourself, and consider thoroughly what you are to do to be a good Christian, and what reasons you have so to be ? When, I say, did you take time thoroughly to weigh with yourself in your deepest thought, the nature, and end, and reasons of the holy religion you do profess, so as upon a full conviction, to come up to this firm resolution ; saying, *I do here, O my blessed God, from my heart, resolve, from this very moment for ever, by the help of thy grace, for which I do, and will always most heartily pray, to be wholly thine in Christ Jesus my blessed Redeemer, behaving myself, as a faithful subject in his kingdom, obediently to all his commands without exception. This I have vowed to do in baptism ; and that vow I do now most willingly renew, without all guile and hypocrisy ?* When, I say, did you do thus ?

Par. I fear very few among us ever did any such thing.

Min. How then can you think yourselves Christians, if you never thus once resolved to be Christians ?

Par. I thought it had been enough to have done thus in baptism, when in effect we did thus give ourselves to God.

Min. That is as much as to say, you think it enough to have done it when you knew not what you did ; and now that you are able to do it knowingly, you are not willing to be at the trouble. Let me but ask you one question more at this time ; Did you not in your baptism renounce all friendship with the enemies of God, and your own soul ?

Par.

Par. I did renounce the devil, the wicked world, and the sinful lusts of the flesh.

Min. Indeed, except you do so in very good earnest, your pretence of taking the Lord for your God, is a mere mockery; it is a contradiction to say you take the true God for your only Lord and Master, whilst you continue in the service of other masters, which are in all things contrary to him. Do you then, in good earnest, renounce all these?

Par. I am sure I am not willing to have any dealing with the devil; but that I as heartily renounce the wicked world, and the lusts of the flesh, as I do that wicked one, I dare not say.

Min. Think you, that whilst you renounce not these two, which you promised never to follow nor be led by, you have no dealing with the devil? Do not so deceive yourself, whilst you are in love with these, he hath dealing with you, and you with him. By what doth the devil daily tempt you to sin against God, but by the things of the world? And how doth he by these at any time prevail upon you, but by the help of the flesh, and the lusts thereof? When you say you renounce these three, you should mean, that you renounce all sin or disobedience to God, with all the abettors of it, and all the temptations and incitements to it: and to pretend to give yourself to Christ, who came *to redeem you from all iniquity*, Tit. ii. 14. or to the Holy Ghost, desiring nothing more than to be sanctified or made holy by him, and yet not to strive with all your might to resist all the temptations to it, by mortifying and subduing your carnal lusts, is a mere pretence, and no more. Again, I say, be not deceived; God will not thus be mocked by you, so long as you love the things of the world, and willingly lay yourself open to any of those temptations
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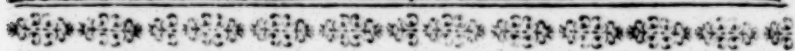
which are wont so easily to prevail over you, and draw you into sin ; so long as you neglect to watch over yourself, and carefully to suppress and stifle all the motions of your lusts, you in vain call yourself a Christian.

Par. I see but few, even of those who are noted for the better sort of Christians, so diligent in watching over themselves, and against all temptations as you talk of.

Min. The more is the pity ; but this must not encourage you to be careless of yourself, except you can think it wisdom to perish with the many, rather than be safe with the few. But, to be short with you, To renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, is all one with that which Christ commands us to do, if we will be his disciples ; that is, to *deny ourselves*. If you have learned to do this, you are a Christian ; if you have not, do not deceive yourself in thinking yourself one.


Par. I wish you would explain to me that great christian duty for my learning ; for, I confess, I do not well understand it.

Min. I shall, I hope, have opportunity to make it plain to you shortly ; at present, let it suffice to tell you, that it principally consists in the resisting of your own corrupt affections, and renouncing the lusts of the flesh, and with-holding from yourself the pleasing things, which by reason of your corruption you are apt to desire, contrary to the will of God. If you do this, the world cannot allure you, the devil can have no power over you, and therefore this is your principal task as a Christian, to get the mastery of yourself, that is your lusts. I shall leave you now to think upon these things which we have spoken of this day, and try how good a Christian you are, by the care you have taken to keep and make good your vow in baptism. My business commands me to bid you farewell for this time.



S E C T. XVI.

How we may deceive ourselves in our Faith.

Par.  I R, I am come to wait upon you for some more of your instructions, if you be at leisure.

Min. I am at leisure ; and you are welcome to the best instructions I can give you.

Par. I begin to be more and more afraid that I am not so good a Christian as I thought I had been. By what you said to me last concerning baptism, and the vow therein made to God, I find, upon examination of myself, that I never rightly understood it. I am satisfied, that it is not the making of vows and promises to God, but the performing of them, that must through Christ render us acceptable to him. I then promised to do my christian duty, but I fear I have neither taken pains enough to learn it, nor have been so careful as I should^d have been to do it. I desire now that you would help me to discern my failings herein, for I am afraid they are very many.

Min. It is well that you are jealous of yourself, and are desirous to see your failings : I hope it is, that you may amend them, and become a better Christian than you have been hitherto.

Par. That is my earnest desire.

Min. If this be your earnest desire, you need not fear but you shall have your desire ; he that
bungreth,

hungreth and thirsteth after righteousness, shall be filled, Matt. v. 6. That you may therefore as compendiously as may be, be instructed in your christian duty, I shall endeavour to lay it before you in speaking of those three mother graces, *Faith, Hope, and Charity*. All christian duty lieth in the due exercise of these three ; and there is nothing in the christian religion which is not reduceable to one or other of them. Try yourself, therefore, if you deceive not yourself in any of these, and first in your *faith*.

Par. That I desire to be well instructed in ; for the promise of eternal life is made unto him that believeth, and *he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life*, John iii. 36. And great things are spoken of faith in the scripture, as, that *without which it is impossible to please God*, Heb. xi. 6. And yet by what you have already said of it, I perceive, that true faith is something else than we commonly take it to be.

Min. Yet, you know, that every professor of the Gospel pretends to have it. Who will not say, if you ask him, that he believeth in God, and his word, and also in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost, and that he trusteth to God for salvation through the merits of Christ, and the sanctification of the Holy Ghost ?

Par. We do profess all this, and think it our duty so to do.

Min. If you do so, it is your duty to profess you do so : but though it be your duty both so to do, and so to profess it, yet is it not your duty, but your sin to profess a lye, that you do so, when you do not. Are you sufficiently instructed, so that you understand the things, that as Christians you are to believe ? If you are not, you have not faith. How should they believe, that know not, neither are willing to learn what they are to

believe? If you remain in ignorance of these things, your faith is but a blind faith, or rather nothing. How many among us will needs be called Believers, which is but another name for Christians, who were never yet well instructed in the meaning of the fundamental *articles of the christian faith*? Who cannot tell what they mean by God, or what the things are which God hath in his word commanded them to believe? Nay, some of them understand not where the word of God is to be found: so little know they what God hath promised, or what are the offices of Jesus Christ, or the work of the Holy Ghost. Thus to say they believe all, and yet to know almost nothing, Is not this Self-deceit?

Par. I must needs grant, whilst we are ignorant of things necessary to be believed, we cannot be true believers. But I hope we, who have been catechized, and hear sermons whereby these things are taught us from the word of God, cannot many of us be so ignorant, as not to know what is to be believed. And if we do understand what we are to believe, and believe what we understand, I hope you will grant, that we have faith.

Min. If you do believe, you do believe, or have faith; that is certain. Yet there is something more to be thought on, before you may conclude, that you believe as Christians, and have true faith. Hath your faith or belief any solid *reason* or sure *foundation* to stand upon?

Par. It is not *reason*, but divine *revelation* that our christian faith is founded upon. The word of God is a solid and sure foundation, and whilst we have this, we need not seek for any reason of our belief.

Min. It is very true, that it is divine revelation, or the written word of God, whereon our christian
faith

faith is built ; and this is a sure foundation : but this hinders not that your faith must also be built upon solid reason. And if it be not, it is not properly faith, but rather what some call a negative belief, or a mere not disbelieving. How many, who have been by the care of others so far instructed in the understanding of the words of scripture, and of their catechisms, that they not only can say much of them by heart, but understand the true sense of the words which they repeat ; yet are not able to give any reason why they should believe the things which they utter to be true ?

Par. Is not this reason enough, that they are affirmed in the word of God to be true ?

Min. Yet we are commanded *to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us*, 1 Pet. iii. 15.

Par. We are so ready, if we can shew the word of God for our hope.

Min. But suppose he that asketh you a reason of your hope, or faith, be an infidel, that believeth not the scripture to be God's word, as those were to whom St. Peter chargeth Christians to give an answer ; What reason can you give to such an one ? It is neither enough to him, nor indeed to yourself, to say, this, which I believe, is expressly affirmed in the scripture, unless you have reason to believe that scripture to be the word of God.

Par. That is true indeed.

Min. Have you ever then well examined whether these things that you believe be indeed so, as you have been taught ; and why in all reason they must be so, by consulting the scripture to see if they agree with it ? The thing for which St. Paul commended the *Beræans*, Acts xvii. 11. *that they searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so* ; many amongst us, through negligence

or laziness, or unconcernedness for the faith which they profess, take no pains at all to be *grounded and settled in the faith*, that they *be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel*, as the apostle speaks *Col. i. 23.* but are contented to take all for granted upon trust, without any more ado; and so cannot be said properly to believe them by any rational act of soul, but only not to disbelieve, deny or question them. And some, it may be, having heard that some of those things which we are to believe are above human reason, think it in vain, or indeed wicked, to seek any reason of their faith, or to make any use of their reason in matters of faith: as if God did not require of men a reasonable, but a blind service; or, as if that could be called, A reasonable service, for which a man can give no reason, or that, Faith, where a man can give no reason why he believeth.

Par. Is it not true, that many of the things which we are to believe are above our reason? And would you have us give a reason for that which is above our reason?

Min. I would have you able to give a reason why you believe them, though they be above your reason: yea, and the more they are above your reason, the more need is there that you have a good reason why you believe them. Men may justly laugh at you as a credulous fool for believing things above all human reason, if you cannot render a reason why you should believe things so seemingly unreasonable; nay, more, without a convincing reason for it, you cannot believe such things. There are indeed, some propositions which we are bound most firmly to believe, which are not evident to us by any reasoning of ours, nor can be made so by others, as being above our natural capacity to perceive, and so are above our reason. But if we have no reason to believe them
true,

true, then is it not our duty to believe them ; for there must be some reason why a duty is a duty, or it can be none.

Par. Such reason we have ; God hath affirmed them in his word, and therefore though they be above our reason, we believe them.

Min. You say well ; the great reason why we believe all divine and supernatural truths is the authority of God, who hath revealed them unto us, and commanded us to believe them with all humble submission of our reason to his veracity. But doth it not hence follow, that before you can believe the thing revealed by God to be true, you must have a reason to convince you, that it is indeed revealed by God ; and before you can be convinced of that, you must have reason to convince you that there is a God, and that nothing which God revealeth unto us can be false. In short, then, he that hath no reason to believe a thing, cannot believe it. How then is this, unto which you will needs give the name of Faith, though it cannot deserve it, like to hold out in the day of trial ? Will any man be so mad as to suffer and die, as the Christian must be ready to do, for believing that, which he hath no reason to believe ? If such a man suffer, though his sufferings may be occasioned by his profession of the christian faith, yet can it not be for that faith's sake, but for something else (whatever it be) that he is content to suffer. If then you pretend to have faith, and yet have not such reasons for your faith, as may serve to convince you of the truth of what you believe, you must needs deceive yourself in that pretence.

Par. I hope I have sufficient grounds whereon to believe whatever is revealed unto me by God in his word.

Min. Suppose it to be so, that you are convinced by the reasons you have heard or read that there is a God, and that he made and ruleth you and all the world, and that he hath in his word revealed his will unto you, and that the scripture is his word, and that whatsoever you read there is true ; Do you think that this is saving faith ?

Par. If I believe all this upon sufficient grounds, I must also believe what I am there told, that whosoever believeth the Gospel of Christ, and obeyeth it, shall be saved, and that, not for any righteousness of his own, though neither without a righteousness of his own, but by the mercy of God offered unto us in Jesus Christ.

Min. What if you be convinced of the truth of all this ?

Par. Then I ought to believe it, and this I take to be true faith.

Min. You say true ; this is true faith : but is this sufficient ? Or think you that such a faith as this will save you ?

Par. Will not true faith save us ?

Min. Faith may be true, and not saving. Historical faith may be true faith, and may not be sufficient to save him that hath it.

Par. I grant it is not enough to believe the history of the bible, but we must also believe the promises and threatenings, and whatever doctrines are therein delivered.

Min. All this may be but an historical faith, by which is not meant (as you seem to think) a bare belief of the history, but such a belief of all things in God's word, as you are wont to have of a true history, that is a belief that what you read therein is true.

Par. Will not such a belief save a man ?

Min. No ; will such a belief as the devils may have, save a man ? *The devils also believe, and tremble,*

tremble, Jam. ii. 19. Will you call yourselves good Christians, for believing as much as the devils believe? Why then should not they be good Christians too? And why should not they be saved by the same faith whereby you hope to be saved?

Par. Because they have no promise of salvation made unto them, which they should believe, but we have; we therefore believe much more than they believe, or can believe. I do not then only believe, that all God's word in general is true, as I suppose the devils may do, but that Christ died for me to save me, that the promise of salvation is made unto me, and that I am one of God's elect children, whom he hath chosen and predestinated in Christ Jesus to salvation, and that by this faith I am justified, and shall be saved. Now the devils neither do, nor can believe thus for themselves, as I do; they know that Christ never died for them, nor is there any word of comfort to them in all the Scripture, but all terror, and therefore their faith makes them tremble; but mine makes me confident, and I hope I shall hold fast my confidence and full assurance to the end.

Min. I perceive you think that this is a sufficient faith; yea, you are confident that you shall be saved by it: take heed that you be not confident of a falshood, and believe not a lye, and lest all this be no more than a groundless presumption and vain confidence. You say, you believe that Christ died for you, and that the promise of salvation is made to you: this is true, and you do well to believe it, so that you also make a right use of it.

Par. What use do you mean?

Min. That you, by this belief, encourage yourself to live in all humble and sincere obedience to Christ, and become such a one, as he in his Gospel hath

hath told you he expects all his followers should be. If you do not thus improve your faith unto true godliness, though Christ died for you, he will not be your Saviour. Christ indeed, *by the grace of God, did taste death for every man*, Hebr. ii. 9. *He gave himself a ransom for all*, 1 Tim. ii. 6. But he will not save all. Some there are that *deny even the Lord that bought them*, 2 Pet. ii. 1. yea, though *they profess they know God, yet in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate*, Tit. i. 6. You must have better evidence of your being elected and predestinated to salvation, than your strong confidence that you are so. You must be in Christ, and find the spirit of Christ in you, or you are not his. Many men are very confident in believing a lye, and yet it is no less a lye, because they are so confident of its truth. It is not a strong confidence that is a saving faith; a strong confidence may be nothing else but a strong delusion to believe a lye, 2 Thess. ii. 11. Faith without works is but a dead thing, and a dead faith will bring no man to eternal life.

Par. I find the faith that is in me to be a working and a lively faith, and it sets me much on work.

Min. What work doth it set you upon?

Par. It makes me very desirous of salvation by Christ; it makes me rejoyce in Christ, as in my gracious Saviour.

Min. Doth it make you hate and abstain from that which will destroy you, I mean, sin?

Par. Yea, it makes me carefully shun many foul sins, whereof I see others daily guilty.

Min. Doth it make you use diligently the means of salvation?

Par. It makes me pray often, and read the Scriptures often, and hear the word preached often,

often, and receive the sacrament often, and to delight to talk and confer much with others of religion: yea, it makes me very zealous for God, so that I cannot indure to hear men swear by his name in vain, nor to see them break and profane the Lord's day, nor to abuse the Scripture, nor to talk scornfully or reproachfully of godliness or godly men; yea, it makes me do good works, give alms to the poor, and to suffer many injuries patiently, and many other good things it works in me, and by me, and therefore I cannot but think that I have the true and saving faith of a Christian.

Min. If it be as you say, you have something that belongs to it, and which you ought to have. But take heed, after all this, that your faith prove not the faith of a Pharisee, and not of a sincere Christian. Hath your faith purified your heart from all pride and hypocrisy, and unclean desires, and earthly-mindedness, and selfishness? Doth it work by love so as you love God above all things, and for himself, and every man, even your enemies, for God's sake, and in obedience to his will? And hath it given you the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, so as to render all their blandishments and threatnings, all their frowns and fawnings, all their gilded poisons and fiery darts, ineffectual to the ends of drawing or driving you out of the ways of God's commandments? Have you learnt to live by faith, and not by sight? Are you weaned in your affections from things present, which are seen, and is your heart set on things above out of sight, on God, and spiritual and heavenly delights and possessions? If your faith work not so, as to purge the heart, and cleanse it more and more from its corruption, and all those evil humours whereunto it is naturally subject, so far at least, that they be
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no longer predominant in you, it works to little purpose, nor will it fit you, or make you *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*, Col. i. 12.

Par. I am not able to affirm so much of my faith, as you speak of.

Min. I speak no more of it than God himself doth in his word, yet, I confess, the faith of some may be sound, and good, and acceptable to God, and yet they may not be sensible of this virtue, and operation of it, in themselves; and therefore I would not have you conclude to the discomfort of your soul, that you have not saving faith, because you are not sensible of all this, but to go forward, labouring after more strength, and praying daily to God to increase your faith.

Par. I thank you for your good advice. Yet, seeing it is a very uncomfortable thing to him that considereth for himself, and would use all diligence to make his calling and election sure, to think himself void of that faith, without which he can never please God, nor be saved, tell me, I beseech you, how I may be able, by the sense of my faith, to keep myself from being quite dejected and falling into despair.

Min. Though you should not yet find any thing in yourself, whereby you may conclude that you are a true believer, yet have you no reason at all to be quite dejected, or to despair; for what you are not yet, by the grace of God you may be. Some enter not into the vineyard till the *eleventh hour*, Matt. xx. 6. Yet, if they enter then, and labour as they ought, the *penny* shall be as sure unto them, as to those who have borne the burden and heat of the day. As long as you live upon earth, the way to heaven lieth open before you, and you may yet enter into it, and walk in the light whilst you have the light; but take heed how you stand any longer idle, when Christ is daily calling you
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in to work; beware, lest the night come upon you, wherein no man can work. What you want then despair not of getting, so long as it is offered unto you. You must despair of ever being happy, by continuing in unbelief; and this despair should make you labour the more diligently for true faith. Lie not therefore complaining, that there is no hope; this were to say, that you serve a hard master. And whilst you only complain of your want, and seek not to have it supplied, you are like to continue in want, and die for want. But rise up quickly, *ask, seek, and knock*, pray, and beg importunately, use the means and labour industriously, continue at work, and at prayer, and persevere incessantly, and you need not despair, serving so gracious and bountiful a master as you do.

Par. There is indeed much comfort in this that you now say; yet, because I would be as able as may be, to judge aright of the soundness of my faith, I desire you would afford me the best help you can.

Min. I do not blame you for that desire, for it is your duty: and to help you as well as I can in this, I shall need only ask you this question: Can you truly say, that you have understandingly and heartily given your full consent to the whole Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Par. I do really believe the whole Gospel of Christ to be true.

Min. That is only to *assent* unto it as to a truth, which, I told you before, is but an *historical faith*, and insufficient. You may *hold the truth in unrighteousness*, Rom. i. 18. But I ask, If you *consent* unto it, as it tenders unto you the covenant of grace, and invites you to engage in it, and keep it, as the only way to eternal life.

Par. This is my profession, as a Christian, that I am in covenant with God in Jesus Christ ; if then I should not consent so to be, I must confess myself an hypocrite and dissemble in this profession.

Min. If you fully consent unto the Gospel thus considered, then you do assent to all that is therein affirmed as certainly true, and are pleased that God hath revealed these things unto you by his Son, and are thankful for it : You look upon the *promises* therein made as infallible, but withal think it reasonable, and are very willing, that they should imply the conditions of *repentance*, *faith*, and *obedience* ; and you desire not to have what is promised upon other terms : You own the precepts therein contained to be very just and reasonable, and you willingly accept of them as the laws whereby you are to live. Lastly, you also acknowledge the threatnings of the Gospel to be just, and are content that the evils threatned shall be your portion, if you behave not yourself as a Christian. This consenting to the Gospel cordially and unfeignedly, is the true faith of a Christian.

Par. But all the difficulty is, to find whether this consent be cordial and sincere. I would fain know how I may understand this.

Min. Concerning this I have said enough to you before. The surest sign of sincerity, is the care you take to be so, and diligence you use to be satisfied that you are so. Do you in earnest make it your business to perform the conditions implied in the promises ? Do you vow and yield, to the utmost of your strength, an universal obedience to the commands of Christ your sovereign King ? Do you stand in awe of the threatnings, and labour, by your dutifulness to Christ, to prevent their falling upon you ? Do you all this in
love

love and good-will, with chearfulness and thankfulness to God for calling you to it? Do you thus totally devote yourself to the service of Christ, resolving, whatsoever shall befall you in this world, to continue in it? Then you ought not to doubt, but so doing, your soul is safe in the hands of your Saviour: You should *know whom you have believed, and be persuaded, that he is able to keep that which you have committed to him against that day,* 2 Tim. i. 12. That you shall be *kept through the power of God through faith unto salvation,* 1 Pet. i. 5. By such a faith as this you will become one of the children of faithful *Abraham*, who *believed in hope, even against hope*, and ventured upon the severest commands in belief of the most unlikely promises. Doth your faith make you slight all improbabilities and difficulties that seem to stand in the way of the promises? Doth it make you engage chearfully in the hardest, most unpleasant and painful services, in confidence of God's mercy in Jesus Christ? Then you have all reason to hold on comfortably in your Christian race, and commit the issue of all to God.

Par. I pray God I may ever do so! Have you any more to say to me about the tryal of my faith?

Min. What I have hitherto said, hath been spoken only of *faith* in general; I suppose it may be very needful, for the better discovery of Self-deceit in believing, to pose you a little, though but briefly, in some of the *articles* of your Christian faith, lest you deceive yourself, as I fear many do, in thinking you rightly believe them, when you do not so much as understand them.

Par. I am very willing you should do so; for I fear I may be as ignorant herein as some others.

Min. You repeat your Creed, I suppose, sometimes; do you not?

Par.

Par. Why should you seem to doubt of it, in asking if I do not?

Min. I have some reason to doubt whether you do or no, because most of you do not repeat it, *when*, and *as* you are commanded by the church to do. You do not stand up, when I repeat it in the church, as you are ordered to do, but sit as if you were unconcerned in it; and few of those that do stand up, repeat it audibly as they ought. I may well fear therefore, that they who do it not when it is required of them so to do, and as they are ordered to do it, do it not at all.

Par. I thought it had been enough for us to be attentive to you, whilst you do rehearse it publicly.

Min. I am not preaching to you when I rehearse the Creed, but making confession of faith; and I make not confession of your faith, but of my own, as you ought to do of yours. You must therefore make confession with your own mouths, or you are there at that time to no purpose, seeing you join not in the publick worship with me and others. When you pray with me to God, you may do it secretly, for it is only to God that you pray; but when you confess your faith, you should do it openly, because you do it before the church as well as to God, that all may be satisfied that you are in profession a member of the church.

Par. I did not consider this; but I promise to mend this fault henceforth.

Min. Suppose then that you repeat your *Creed*, and would have the confession of your faith therein accounted as a declaration of your Christianity. Let me advise you to take heed, that you lye not both to God, and the church, and yourself, when you say, *I believe*.

Par. I hope this advice is needless to me. I say it in very good earnest.

Min.

Min. That may be, and yet you may not do what in earnest you say you do.

Par. I could not say in earnest, *I believe*, if I did not believe.

Min. You could not say so in earnest, if you did not think you believe; and I can hardly imagine, that most of you would do as you do, if you did believe indeed. Do they *believe in God*, who live as if they had no God but themselves to serve?

Par. It seems hard to imagine how they should.

Min. Yet is this to be firmly believed, before a man can believe one article of the Christian faith; for the Christian faith supposeth the being of God, as a thing beyond dispute with those that come to engage themselves in this religion. *He that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi. 6. What mean you, when you say, *I believe*?

Par. When I say *I believe* any thing, I mean this, that *I take it to be true*.

Min. Do you mean, that you only think it to be true?

Par. I mean, that I am strongly persuaded, and fully convinced of it.

Min. How are you convinced or persuaded of the truth of these things, which you say you believe? Do you see them with your eyes?

Par. No. The things which we profess in the Creed to believe, are not within the reach of sight, our *faith comes by hearing*, not by sight, Rom. x. 17.

Min. Are they such things as evidently appear true to you at the first hearing of them, without any reasoning about them?

Par. How should that be, seeing they are such mysteries, some of them, as reason cannot comprehend; as, that *three Persons should be but one God*;

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that *the same person should be God and man*; that *the same body, after it is corrupted in the grave, should rise again.*

Min. What then can persuade you to believe such things as these?

Par. We have been taught so to do in our Catechisms, and they are proved to us out of the Scripture.

Min. By whom were those Catechisms made, and who taught you them?

Par. They were made by learned and godly men, and were taught us by our parents and our ministers.

Min. And is this reason enough to you to believe them, that they are taught you by men? May not men be deceived, and deceive you?

Par. Yes, they may; but I told you, they prove them to us out of the Scripture.

Min. Why do you believe what is taught you out of the Scripture?

Par. Because the Scripture is the *word* of God.

Min. Who told you that the Scripture is the word of God?

Par. Every body that I meet with can tell me that; what reason hath any one to question it?

Min. The greatest part of the world doth not own it to be the word of God; and the *Jews*, that own the books of the Old Testament to be so, do not own those of the New Testament to be so too. And what reason have you to believe the men that tell you so, rather than those others that deny it?

Par. I know not what to say to that; I thought no body had denied it.

Min. If you believe the Scripture to be the word of God, you must believe that there is a God: Why do you believe this?

Par.

Par. God forbid that I should not believe this ; if there were no God, then were we all in a sad condition.

Min. That is very true ; but you tell me not what reason you have to believe it.

Par. I thought no body could ever question it ; you can meet with no body, but he hath ever and anon the name of God in his mouth.

Min. For ought I see then, all the reason you have to believe that there is a God, is this, that men say there is a God : And again, you believe the Scripture to be the word of God, only because men say it is the word of God. Thus you have been taught, and therefore thus you believe. And do you think that this is to believe indeed ? Suppose you lived among the *Turks*, would you not, for the same reason, believe *Mahomet* to be a true prophet ? And if you lived among the *Heathens*, would you not, for the same reason, believe their *Idols* to be gods ? And if all men, among whom you live, should renounce the Scripture and the true God, must you not, for the same reason, renounce them too ?

Par. God forbid it should be as you say !

Min. *Amen.* And yet it must be so if you have no better reason to convince you of the truth of what you believe, than you have yet given. Nor is this that you call *believing*, believing indeed ; but only, as before I told you, a bare taking things on trust, or a not disbelieving them, and signifies a strange carelessness and unconcernedness for the truth ; that you do not search into the reasons, whereby you may be rationally persuaded of it. This is no more than to say, you believe with another man's faith, though you have none of your own.

Par. I believe what others believe ; yet not by their faith, but my own.

Min. By your own indeed, such as it is; but such as it is, it is not a true faith, such as God calls for, which is a rational act of the soul. But seeing I have said enough of this before, I shall now only tell you, that God requires you should make use of your reason, as well as your ears: He hath given you ears to hear, and he hath given you reason to judge of what you hear. You are to *examine all things, and hold fast that which is good*, 1 Theff. v. 21. To see that *no man deceive you with vain words*, Eph. v. 6. You are *not to be children in understanding, but men*, 1 Cor. xiv. 20. God hath *not left himself without witness*, Acts xiv. 17. But he hath made such discoveries of himself unto us, both in his works and in his word, that he expects we should see him with our own eyes, and not only take on trust what others tell us of him. These things therefore you must do, if you will be a believer. *First*, You must get a right *notion* of God, as he is the first and eternal Author of all beings, the Maker and Governor of all things, infinite in all perfections. *Secondly*, You must, by the consideration of those evidences which he hath given us of his *being, power, wisdom and goodness*, labour to be thoroughly convinced and persuaded in your mind, that there is a God, and no other but he. *Thirdly*, You must, by considering the *nature and perfection* of God, be persuaded, that he is most *faithful and true*, and that whatsoever is said by him, is certainly true. *Fourthly*, You must, by considering the purity and excellency of the doctrine which is taught us in the Scripture, and the manifest attestation of the *spirit* to it, by prophecies and miracles, &c. be convinced, that it came from God, who cannot lye. If you do not make this use of your reason to satisfy yourself, according to the best of your understanding and opportunities, of the reasonableness of your belief,

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you do but deceive yourself, when you say, you believe.

Par. Alas! Sir, you seem not to consider the condition of us unlearned men. You, who are scholars, are able thus to reason yourselves into belief; but we want education and learning to fit us for such reasoning. We are no philosophers, but poor idiots.

Min. But you are men, and are not willing to be accounted fools. You have reason, and can consider the wonderful works of God in the world which you daily see, and of which you daily taste the sweetness, and reap the benefit and comfort. *And the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that you are without excuse, Rom. i. 20.* You can feel the wonderful powers that are in your own souls, and see the admirable frame of your own bodies, and observe in both how fearfully and wonderfully you are made, and how powerful, wise and good he must needs be that made you. You can observe what you hear and read in the Scriptures, and see the goodness of the laws therein given, and the many evidences of the truth of those things therein recorded, and how worthy the doctrine is of God, and how useful to men, and how well fitted in all respects to commend itself to our embracing. Take heed how you think that you are excusable, for not seeing and considering what you can both see and consider, if you will: This is Self-deceit. I will not now ask you, if you know what is meant by the word *God*; nor if you believe him to be your *Father*; but at this time I only ask you, If you believe God to be *Almighty*?

Par. I do believe that God hath all power, that he hath a full right to us, and is able to do what

he will, and hath a sovereign and absolute authority to rule and order all things.

Min. You say you do believe this; but do you believe it as a Christian should do?

Par. I believe this of God; and what more can a Christian do?

Min. A Christian's belief is a practical belief, which affects his heart, and begets therein thoughts, affections, desires, and resolutions, suitable to the things which he believeth. If your faith do not so, you believe not as a Christian should do.

Par. I hope it doth so.

Min. If it did so, you would stand more in awe of God than you do; and as you highly esteem God for his wisdom, and love him for his goodness, so would you fear him for his power, saying, *O Lord, thou art great, and thy name is great in might; who would not fear thee, O King of nations?*

Jer. x. 6, 7. This belief would soon convince you of the folly and madness of venturing upon sin, whereby God is offended, and provoked to exercise his power against you. You would take heed of *provoking the Lord to jealousy*, because you know you are *not stronger than he*, *1 Cor. x. 22.* You would consider well what you go about, and see that all your counsels and designs be according to his will, knowing that he hath power to defeat and frustrate them all, to take you in your own net, and make you fall into the same pit that your hands have digged. You would beware how you harden yourself against him, how you despise or slight his commands or his judgments, knowing, that if you do so, you cannot prosper, *Psal. lxvi. 7.* You would place no confidence in yourself, nor in any other, knowing, that *though band joyn in band, the wicked shall not be unpunished*, *Prov. xi. 21.*

Par.

Par. These are things I do not consider so well as I should.

Min. As the belief of God's *power* would deter you from sin; so would it humble you, make you less stubborn, abate your haughtiness and arrogance, and break you of your self-will. *He resisteth the proud*, 1 Pet. v. 5.; therefore would you *humble yourself under the mighty hand of God*, ver. 6. This would also make you trust in God, be the thing promised never so unlikely, as *Abraham* did, *who did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able to perform*, Rom. iv. 20, 21. Yea, you would intirely depend upon God's providence, whilst you busied yourself in doing his will; no streights, no dangers or difficulties would dismay you, but you would comfort yourself in all honest undertakings, in the belief of his power, to strengthen you in serving him.

Par. I see there is much more in the practical belief of God's *Almightiness*, than I ever thought of.

Min. I could tell you of much more than this, but that I shall have a fitter occasion to mind you of it afterwards. By this little you may see how men deceive themselves, in saying they believe God to be *Almighty*. Do you believe him also to be *Maker of heaven and earth*?

Par. I do verily believe that God made me, and all the world, and all things therein.

Min. If you believe this practically as a Christian, then are you much taken up with the admiration of God's wonderful *power*, and *wisdom*, and *goodness* shining forth from all his works, above you, and about you. This is delightful to your soul, when you are abroad at your work, and see the wonders that he hath wrought. Your heart is

filled with thankfulness, in considering how all these things were made for your use and comfort, and how you were made capable of using them, and reaping the good of them, and praising God for them. *When you consider the heavens, the works of his fingers, the moon and the stars, which he hath ordained, can you forbear to cry out, Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him?* Psal. viii. 3, 4. Yea, your trust and reliance on his providence is still more and more confirmed, and your soul faith within you, *My help cometh from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth,* Psal. cxxi. 2.

Par. Alas! our souls cleave too much to the earth, to be affected with these considerations as they ought.

Min. If God made you, and all things, I hope you will grant that he made all things *wisely* and *well*.

Par. Whatsoever God doth, he doth *wisely* and *well*.

Min. Do they believe this practically, who are not willing to be as God made them, either in soul, or in body? Why are you unwilling to be restored to righteousness and holiness, and to have the *image* of God renewed upon your souls? Why are so many of you displeased with your own bodies, and do as good as say, that God either wanted skill or kindness to you, in making them such as they are, *that is*, not so handsome and beautiful as you would have them? Why endeavour you to alter them for the better, as you think, if you believe he hath made them well? And how comes it to pass, that you do so commonly scorn, jeer and reproach others for their unhandsomeness, whilst they are no otherwise than as God made them? Lastly, if God made all things, how dare you use your cloaths, your food, or any thing that God hath made for your use, to his dishonour

dishonour and your hurt, in feeding your luxury, and serving your pride? I ask you again, Is not he that made you your Owner; and are not you, and all things that he hath made, wholly his?

Par. Undoubtedly we must needs all be his who made us; I told you before, he hath all right in us, and to us.

Min. I wish you would all believe this in good earnest, and not in words only say it. Can you freely submit yourself to God's disposal, and be well content he do what he will with his own, make you rich or poor, honourable or disgraced and despised? Are you well satisfied with the portion and condition which he allotteth you? And are you very well content, whenever all of it, or any part of it, is taken from you? Do you carefully and providently manage his goods for his honour and interest; lay them out freely, according to his order, and in his service; waste nothing of them on your back or belly, or sinful lusts? Once more; Is not he that made you your Governor?

Par. Yes; I believe he hath sovereign and absolute authority over me and all the world.

Min. Do you believe this, and yet will be governed by your own wills and desires, and use yourselves, and what you have, at your own pleasure? Are you ready to obey his severest commands, and patiently to bear his sharpest chastisements? Can you not find in your heart to break his laws, or disorder the world under his government by sin? Can you say, whatever falls out, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good,* 1 Sam. iii. 18. *I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it?* Psal. xxxix. 9. Can you comfort yourself, howsoever the world frowns upon you, with the thoughts of God's wise ordering of
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all things, saying, *The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* If you believe as you say, how is it that you are so full of cares and fears for yourself? Why do you enjoy his gifts and the benefits of his government with so little thankfulness, or sense of obligation thereby laid upon you, as though all were owing to yourselves, and the fruit of your own wit and industry? I will go no farther with you upon this first article of your Creed. Let us come to the next. Do you believe in JESUS CHRIST?

Par. I do believe in JESUS CHRIST, God's only SON our LORD, &c.

Min. What do you mean by JESUS?

Par. That Divine Person that came to *save his people from their sins*, Matt. i. 21.

Min. What mean you, when you say, *He came to save his people from their sins?*

Par. I mean, that he came to save them from *eternal death and damnation*, which is the due wages of sin; all them, I say, that will submit themselves to him to be his faithful subjects.

Min. That is most true; and therefore you must be his faithful and obedient subject, or else you cannot believe that he will save you; and you cannot be his faithful subject, so long as you continue under the dominion of sin, and serve it. Do you then believe in JESUS a *Saviour*, and yet continue in wilful slavery to that from which he came to *save* you? Can you believe he saves you from what you will not be saved, from those sins with which you are in love? Do you believe that he hath *redeemed you from your vain conversation*, 1 Pet. i. 18. from which you cannot endure to hear of being saved? What is this, but to believe with the devils, that he came to torment you before the time, or to draw you off from that
which

which you will not part with, till death force you to it? A strange belief is this, that JESUS is your Saviour from death, when yet you go on as fast as you can, against all the means which he useth to call you out of it, in the way that certainly leads to death. Do you believe indeed, as you say, that JESUS is the CHRIST?

Par. I do so.

Min. What do you mean by CHRIST?

Par. I mean, that he is the true *Messias* of whom *Moses* in the law and the prophets did write, John i. 41. The anointed, and holy one of God.

Min. To what end was he anointed of God?

Par. He was consecrated by God to the great office of *Mediator* between God and men, and so was made a *Prophet*, a *Priest*, and a *King*.

Min. Do you then believe in *Christ* as a *Prophet*?

Par. Yes; I do believe that he was a *Prophet* mighty in deed and word, Luke xxiv. 19. All things that he heard of the *Father*, he made known to us, John xv. 5.

Min. You must also believe, that he came to call sinners to repentance, Matt. ix. 13. And if you believe all this practically, you will come unto him for the words of eternal life, John vi. 68. And hear him in all things that he saith unto you, Acts iii. 22. Do you really do so? Do you behave yourself as the dutiful and diligent disciple and scholar of Christ? Call you no man *master*, in this sense, upon earth, but him? How can you make this good whilst you addict yourself to learn the customs of the world, and are taught by your own corrupt desires, and hearken to your own evil heart, and to the counsel and advice of your loose and vain companions? Christ teacheth you to renounce all such teachers, and to hearken only to him; do you then believe him to be your teacher

teacher come from God, and will not learn this lesson of him? Whatsoever he is to others, he is not a *Prophet* to you whilst you are not taught of him, but will have a way of your own, such as the *devil*, the *world* and the *flesh* teach you, all which he teacheth you to renounce for ever. Is he your teacher, and have you no more care to study his word, and to learn perfectly the book which he hath given you to learn; and to hear and obey the *ushers* in his school, his *ministers* whom he hath appointed to teach you under him in his church? Do you indeed believe in Christ as an *High-priest*?

Par. I do believe, that he was *called of God an High priest*, Heb. v. 10. and that he offered up himself once for all a sufficient *sacrifice* and *atonement* for the sins of the whole world; and that when he had thus *purged our sins*, he *sate down on the right-hand of the Majesty on high*, and is able to *save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, Heb. vii. 25.

Min. Do you believe this? You are also to remember, *that he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, Heb. ix. 26. And what I told you before, that God is so far reconciled to us sinners by his sacrifice, that he is pleased to issue forth a gracious pardon of all past sins, and of future infirmities, surprizes, or sins heartily repented of, to all those that come in at his call; and being truly humbled for their unworthiness, and weary of their sins, consent to give themselves up in a new covenant to God through Christ, to be led by him to the Father through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. But can you believe that you have a pardon sealed in the blood of this sacrifice, and yet go on in the same sins still? Believe you that Christ became an *High-priest*, and offered

offered himself a sacrifice to take away sins, and yet keep those sins, and will not part with them? Believe you, that he as High-priest is entered in within the veil into the Holiest of all, and the presence of God in heaven, to make intercession for you, and to bless you in *turning away every one of you from your iniquities*, as it is said *Acts* iii. 26. and yet will you not be converted, and turned from them? Do you believe *Christ* also to be your King?

Par. I do believe him to be *King of kings*, and *Lord of lords*, and that *all power is given him in heaven and in earth*, *Matt.* xxviii. 18.

Min. What blessings expect you from *Christ* as King?

Par. I believe he will protect his people from all their enemies, and will reward them with a crown of glory.

Min. He will do so, and shall *reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet*, *1 Cor.* xv. 25. But do you believe this, whilst you take part with these enemies against him, and live in a daily disobedience to his law, and study not the good and welfare of his kingdom? Can you believe he will protect and save you from those enemies, whom you love and serve, and look upon as your dearest friends? Whatever you think of the *devil*, I fear most of you are not yet persuaded to account the *world*, that is, the allurements and temptations of it, the sinful customs and fashions, the pleasures, profits and honours of it, your enemies: much less have you learned to think *yourselves*, the flesh, with the filthy lusts and sinful desires of it, your enemies; and yet of all the enemies that you have, you have none so mischievous to you as *yourselves*. These are the enemies that *Christ* came especially to protect and save us from; and do you indeed believe in him, as your protector

protector and saviour from these enemies, which you are so fond of, and make so much of, and will by no means forsake? Have you by faith taken him for your king, whose kingdom you are not willing to have set up in your heart, but let sin still reign in your affections, and in your mortal bodies, most willingly obeying the lusts thereof? O! how wretchedly do most men deceive themselves in thinking they believe in JESUS CHRIST, when yet they do not own him either as JESUS, or as CHRIST! You say, you believe him to be both the SON of GOD and your LORD: Alas! may he not say unto most of us, *Why call ye me LORD, LORD, and do not the things which I say?* as he said *Luke vi. 46. Not every one that saith unto him, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, Matt. vii. 21.* But he that looking on him as God's only Son, made Heir of all things, received him as he is come in his Father's name, with all power and authority to give law to the world, doth the will of his Father which is in heaven, the same shall be saved by him. Do you believe that Christ shall come again to judge the world in righteousness?

Par. I do believe that he shall come again to judge the quick and the dead.

Min. Is it possible that you should practically believe this, and yet live so carelessly as most of you do, even as if you should never come to a reckoning for your thoughts, words or actions? Did you believe this indeed, what vigilancy would there be in you over your hearts and lives? What cautious endeavours to shun all sin? What examining of your souls and consciences daily? No quiet could you possibly have in your minds, till you found some good ground to hope, that you shall then be acquitted by your judge. When notice

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is given of an *assize* to be held on a certain day, they that have no business there, though they do believe it, do little concern themselves with it: but they who have *causes* there to be tried, or are to be tried themselves for their lives, because they believe it, are much busied in seeking out their writings, preparing their evidences, framing their answers and defences, consulting their council, and making friends in court. And can we believe that Christ will come to judge us all, and to render to every man according to his deeds, and know that we have but a short time, we know not whether one day, to prepare ourselves for judgment; and yet take no care at all about it, nor trouble our heads to consider, what we shall then be able to plead for ourselves, or what will become of us? This cannot be. If such persons think they believe in *Christ* their *judge*, they do but deceive themselves. I ask next, Do you believe in God the *Holy Ghost*?

Par. I do believe also in the *Holy Ghost*, who sanctifieth me and all the elect people of God.

Min. It is well if you know what it is to be *sanctified* by the *Holy Ghost*. If the *Holy Ghost* be actually our *sanctifier*, as his office is to sanctify, and as if we believe practically as Christians, he doth indeed actually sanctify us, then are we an holy people and saints indeed. But, alas! where shall we find any number of such holy persons? Hath the *Holy Ghost* through the word enlightened your understanding with the true knowledge of all things necessary to your salvation? Or hath he inclined your heart earnestly to thirst and seek after this knowledge, and made you industriously busy in learning it? Hath he fully convinced you of the truth of those sacred doctrines which he hath brought you to understand, and wrought a firm belief of them in you? Hath

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he inflamed your soul with a love of divine truth, making you unweariedly seek it, and greedily embrace it? Hath he convinced you of the infinite goodness of God, and of the vanity of the creatures and of yourself; of the beauty of holiness, and excellency of the Gospel; of your own misery and unworthiness, and of the necessity of a Saviour? Hath he persuaded you to change your heart, and to wean yourselves from yourselves, and from all things else but God; and to love God as the supreme good, and every thing that is of God, as representing to us any thing of God? Doth he create in you a longing and panting of soul after God, and a diligence in the use of the means of bringing you to the eternal enjoyment of God? Doth he strengthen you in the inner man, to withstand all temptations, and to conquer all difficulties, and to bear all crosses, and to set light by all sufferings in your way to God?

Par. Who can say that he feels all this in himself?

Min. Every one that believeth in the *Holy Ghost* with a true christian faith, such as that whereby *the just do live*, can find all this, not perfectly, but in some measure and degree in himself. He that doth not, deceiveth himself, if he thinks he believeth in the *Holy Ghost*. In the next place, Do you believe the *holy catholick church*?

Par. I believe *the holy catholick church*, and *the communion of saints*.

Min. I wish you understand the meaning of what you say you believe.

Par. I hope I do. I mean hereby the whole body or society of Christians all the world over, holding communion one with another, and all with Christ, the Head of this universal church, by whom alone it is governed.

Min.

Min. Christ's church, which is properly his body or kingdom, is made up of living members, as lively stones built up a spiritual house on him as a living stone, 1 Pet. ii. 4. and as living and fruitful branches in him the true vine; they that are not so, are taken away, cast forth, withered and burnt, John xv. These, in what distant parts of the world soever they live, worship God with an holy worship in spirit and in truth, according to the gospel of his Son, and endeavour to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, Eph. iv. 3. united unto their one Head, JESUS CHRIST, by one true and living faith, and knit fast one to another as members (though many, of divers sizes, and having divers offices) of one body, animated by one spirit, even the spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of love and holiness, submitting to the government of Christ, and the discipline of the Gospel, under the conduct of such spiritual pastors and guides as he hath set over them.

Par. I thought that all baptized persons had been true members of the church.

Min. By one spirit we are all baptized into one body, 1 Cor. xii. 13. If we hold then this unity of the spirit, we are members of the body; but if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his, Rom. viii. 9. Indeed, as many as are baptized, and continue in the profession of the gospel of Christ, not contradicting that profession by unchristian lives, are in charity to be reputed members of this body, and are capable of all the outward privileges of this society. And the whole company of visible professors, sincere or insincere, which we are not able to discern, are that which we call the *Visible Church*, wherein all the living members and whole body of Christ is (to us) invisibly contained. Now you may be a baptized member of the visible church, and yet an hypo-

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crite,

crite, and perish. You are not a living member of Christ's body, unless you be quickened, enlightened, renewed and cleansed by the Holy Spirit of your Head, Christ Jesus. How then can unholy sinners, who regard not the honour of Christ, nor the peace, prosperity and flourishing of his church, neither delight in the assemblies of the saints, nor in the society of holy and religious persons, who have no care of the members, nor serve one another in love unto edification in faith and holiness; how can they, who delight in the company of the wicked and unholy, and in associating themselves with the enemies of either truth or purity, unity or holy discipline, think they practically believe this *article* of the *Christian Faith*, without the grossest Self-deceit? I doubt not but you will say, that you believe the *Forgiveness of sins*.

Par. You have no cause to doubt it, for I have often said so.

Min. Yet I doubt whether you believe this with a true Christian faith. There is a remission of sins, a pardon sealed in Christ's blood; but I have sufficiently told you already, who shall have the benefit of it; *they only that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit; to them there is no condemnation*, Rom. viii. 1. They that being baptized into the one body of Christ, continue living members of the same in the communion of saints. If any unsanctified person have the confidence to believe that there is a forgiveness of sin for such as he is, he believes a lye, for which he hath no encouragement from any tittle of God's word.

Par. Who can say that he is sanctified, or without sin?

Min. No man living can say he is without sin, but he must deceive himself, as we are told by *St. John*; yet many can say, they are sanctified :
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So are all they that have separated themselves from the wicked world, and have heartily consecrated themselves to the service of the blessed God. Though they cannot totally forsake and be without sin indeed, yet they can and do forsake it in affection, in desire, in endeavour; they hate it, they fight against it, they war continually under Christ's banner against the devil the world and the flesh. This is their sanctification. But tell me; Where do you hope to find the forgiveness of sins?

Par. In the church of Christ.

Min. There indeed it is to be had. Christ hath purchased it by his merits, and he offereth it to you in his Gospel, and sends it to you by the hands of his *ambassadors*, who, in his name, beseech you to accept of it, and to be reconciled to God. Do you seek it at their hands then?

Par. I seek it at the hands of Christ. No mere man can forgive sins.

Min. No man can forgive sins, but God, who hath granted the pardon, as our sovereign Lord offended by us, Christ, who hath procured it, as our powerful Mediator interceding for us, and the Holy Ghost, who inwardly applieth the pardon, as Christ's Advocate, moving us to accept it, preparing us for it, comforting us in it, do make use of the ministry of man in proclaiming it, inviting to it, instructing us how to seek and receive it, and all this by the preaching of the word: and after this, by other ministerial acts to confirm it unto us, as in the administration of the Sacraments, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord. How then can you believe the forgiveness of sins in the church, if you slight or neglect the ministry of man in the word and sacraments, which you do too evidently? Do you believe *the resurrection of the body*?

Par. I do very firmly believe it.

Min. Do you also as practically believe it? Do you regard your body now, as that which must be raised again like unto Christ's most glorious body? Do you use this body as a vessel unto sanctification and honour, as the temple of the Holy Ghost? Do you not rather make it, by all manner of intemperance and uncleanness, a very sty of swinish luts, a very swilling tub of filth, and satan's shop of sins in all variety? If you believed the resurrection, would you not strive to make your body now, as like to what it must be to all eternity as you can? More care would be taken to mortify the lusts thereof, which expose it daily to corruption and eternal perdition, and much less to stuff it with that which serves but to rot and ruin it, or to trim and deck it like the devil's puppet, to please his children with, and tempt them to all lasciviousness and wantonness; or to beautify it like a painted sign, to shew the world that pride keeps house in the heart, ready to give entertainment to the devil, and all his retinue of sins and vanities. Little sense have men of that glory wherein, at the resurrection, the bodies of the saints shall shine, who now abuse them, as is too usual with most. Lastly, you profess to believe the *life everlasting*.

Par. I do so, and firmly believe it.

Min. It is well if you either understand it, or desire it; both which you must do, if you believe it practically as a Christian.

Par. I think I do both.

Min. If you understood it, you would live so as to prepare for it; and that you can do no otherwise than (as I told you before) by practising holiness, and making it even habitual to you, that it may become your delight. The pleasure and glory of everlasting life consists in a conformity to
God

God in holiness; and is not this a thing quite contrary to the life that most men now lead? and if you understand not this, as too few seem to do, you cannot desire it. It is but too plain, that this is it, which most professors of Christianity can hardly endure to hear of; which they will not, by any arguments that we can use, be persuaded to aim at; which they cannot find in their hearts to change their worldly and sensual delights for; which they would willingly never think of more, upon condition that they might never die, but live for ever here to enjoy the pleasures of this present world: nay, on condition they may, without disturbance, enjoy these but for a short life, and not go to hell, or be tormented after death, many would be well content there should be nothing at all after they depart hence. I will now detain you no longer. By this little you may perceive how you are apt to deceive yourselves in your *faith*. When you come next, we shall go on to something else.


Par. I shall not fail (God willing) to wait on you again very shortly.





S E C T. XVII.

How a man may deceive himself in his Hope.

Min.  Am glad to see you here again so soon, neighbour. The last time I shewed you, in some few things, how men deceive themselves in their *Faith*. Will you now that we consider how they may deceive themselves in their *Hope*?

Par. Yea, very gladly, Sir, shall I hear you upon that subject; for if we fail in our *hope*, we must needs be very miserable. It is our *hope* only that keeps our heads above water, that we sink not under the troubles that we undergo in this life: but if we should be deceived in our *hope* at last, and sink down into hell when we think ourselves just going into heaven, it would be very sad indeed. But surely, as long as we *hope in God*, there can be no danger of that.

Min. If your hope be rightly placed in God, you are indeed safe enough; but it may be feared that many, who think they hope aright in God, do not so; there then lies the danger.

Par. It seems somewhat strange to me, that any man should think he hopes in God, when he doth not.

Min. It is no more strange, than that a man should think that he believes in God, when he doth not; and yet, I think, you are convinced
that

that some men do so, and are deceived in their faith; even so may they also be in their hope. Some men have a vain and groundless hope, a hope of their own making, which God will not accept of. The hypocrite hath his hope as well as the sincere Christian, but *the hypocrite's hope shall perish*, Job viii. 13. As there is an *hope that maketh not ashamed*, Rom. v. 5. an *hope whereby we are saved*, Rom. viii. 24. an hope which is an *helmet for the head, the hope of salvation*, 1 Theff. v. 8. and an *anchor of the soul*, Hebr. vi. 19. a *lively hope, whereunto we are begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, 1 Pet. i. 2 so is there an *hope, which is as the giving up of the ghost*, Job xi. 20. *The hope of unjust men perisheth*, Prov. xi. 7. Now that you may be able to discern which of these it is that you have, let me desire you to examine well your own heart, and consider what kind of hope that of the Christian is, and whether yours be such. Tell me first, on what do you ground and build your hope?

Par. On a foundation which, I am sure, can never fail, even on the *nature of God*, as he is a *faithful God*, and cannot lye; a *good God*, who hath given us many rich promises in Jesus Christ; and a *powerful God*, that is able to make good whatever he promiseth.

Min. Thus far well. When a man firmly believeth that there is a God, that he is almighty and good, that the Scripture is his word, and certainly true, and therein findeth many promises of eternal life and blessedness made in Jesus Christ: If he be persuaded in his heart of the loveliness and desirableness of those things which are promised, and longeth to be a partaker of them, he will labour after them, and trusting to the power and faithfulness of God, whatever difficulties he meets with, yet he goeth on in hope to compass them

the end, and in the mean time *rejoyceth in hope*, Rom. xii. 12. There are divers things then that concur to the making up of the Christian's hope; he must *trust* in the goodness and promises of God; he must have a *love* to the thing that is promised; he must have *patience* to expect and stay for it. The object of his hope is something that he doth really esteem to be *good*; men do not use to hope for evil to themselves, but fear and shun it; and this good must be a *future* good; men hope not for what they have; *that which a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for it?* Rom. viii. 24. His hope must have a right *foundation*, the *good nature* and *sure promises* of God; and it must proceed in a right *way*, even the *way* of the *promises*, not neglecting to perform the *conditions* on which they are made. It must be duly qualified with *humility*, and an acknowledgement of his own unworthiness, and a patient depending on God's goodness. Do you think that you have such an hope as this?

Par. I do really think that I have.

Min. I shall meet with few of you that will say otherwise: and as long as they say so, they conclude themselves very safe. Nothing is more pernicious than for a man to conclude himself safe when he is not, for his confidence keeps him from seeking the means of safety. I will ask, why you think that you have a good hope in God?

Par. I can think no otherwise, so long as I have no *doubt* at all of his goodness and mercy. I thank God I have such a strong *confidence* in him, that I never *doubted* of my *salvation* in all my life.

Min. Do you take this to be a good *sign* of a sound christian hope, *that you never doubted of your salvation?* They who never heard of salvation by Christ, never doubted of it; for no man doubteth
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of that which never cometh into his thoughts. And too many, who have heard of it, consider it so little, that they trouble not themselves with any doubts concerning it.

Par. But, I thank God, I have both heard of it, and do often consider it, and do greatly comfort myself in it; and I hope *I shall hold fast the confidence and rejoycing of the hope firm unto the end,* Hebr. i. 6.

Min. I see you are ready at some texts of Scripture, wherewith you comfort yourselves in your own way: I wish you make any better use of them than to deceive yourselves with them.

Par. This is certainly my duty, *to hold fast my confidence;* and I may well comfort myself in it whilst I do so, seeing the *apostle* there tells us, that we are the *house of God*, so long as we do so.

Min. But you must take heed that it be not a vain confidence, and a deceitful hope, that you hold fast. Are you careful and diligent, like the good *earth*, to *bring forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed?* Are you busy at the *work and labour of love?* And do you *shew this diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end?* If not, your hope will deceive you; for *the ground that beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned,* Hebr. vi. 7, 8, 10, 11. I must say, that I therefore the more suspect your hope to be unsound, because you say you never doubted.

Par. I wonder you should do so; for I had thought, that the less any man doubteth, the stronger his hope must needs be.

Min. The stronger indeed it is, but not the truer, it may be, for that. It may be, as I said before of your faith, a strong delusion. It is the sense of a man's ignorance that makes him seek after more knowledge, whilst he that is wise in his

his own conceit takes no pains to be wiser, and therefore is there more hope of a fool than of him. He that is sensible of his wants, will seek to have them supplied; but he that thinks he is rich, and hath nothing, shall die a beggar. He that doubts his salvation is not sure, will use all diligence to make it sure: but he that never doubts of it, seeks not out the means of assuring it. He that doubts not but his way is right, may nevertheless be in a wrong way; but he goeth on confidently in it, and inquireth not of any, whether he be right or wrong, till he be overtaken by the night: whilst he that doubts will inquire, and get good directions, and hath reason to hope that he is right. He that will work out his own salvation, must do it with fear and trembling. Your hope must be, that if you do your endeavour to walk in the ways of God, he will not fail to bless your pious endeavours with good success: and though you are not to doubt of God's faithfulness, yet may you safely doubt of your own. Have you the spirit of Christ?

Par. Why do you ask me that question?

Min. Because without that you cannot have true hope in God: for hope is a fruit of the spirit; we *abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost*, Rom. xv. 13. and *we, through the spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*, Gal. v. 5. If we be not sanctified by the spirit, we have no reason to hope for salvation. Then are we *in Christ Jesus, if we walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit*, Rom. viii. 1. And if we be not in Christ, that is, Christians, we cannot have the hope of Christians. On what do you ground your hope of salvation?

Par. I told you before, on the goodness of God's nature, and his promises made unto us in Jesus Christ.

Min.

Min. When you say you hope in the goodness of God's nature, what is your meaning?

Par. I mean, that as God is *almighty*, and can fulfil his promises, so he is most *merciful* and *gracious*, and bears good-will to us, and so will fulfil them to the utmost.

Min. But do you in the mean time consider withal, that God is also most *just*, and will render to every man according to his works, and give the impenitent sinner his due, which is eternal death? That he is the righteous Governor of the world, and will do right, punishing all stubborn and incorrigible offenders, as well as encouraging and rewarding his dutiful and obedient subjects? Do you remember, that whom he saves, he first qualifies for salvation by repentance, faith, and new obedience? What a vain thing is it to eye the promises of God, and overlook the conditions implied in the promises! Suppose yourself a servant, and that you have a good and honest master, who hath promised you your wages at the year's end, will you hope that he will give you what he promised, only because he is good and honest, tho' you be idle, and do not the work he sets you about?

Par. That were most unreasonable, because I must needs suppose, whether he expressed it in words or no, that he hired me to do his work, and that he promised my wages on no other terms.

Min. Yet how many thousands of you deal thus unreasonably with God, as if he expected no work at your hands? Ye serve yourselves only, and feed your own lusts with his meat, and yet expect that he should give you the reward promised to his obedient servants. Is this to hope in God? No; it is to hope in your own vain conceit, yea, it is to hope against God, that his word is not true, that his promises are not what they are. If
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we ask men that live very wickedly, what they think will become of them when they die, they are ready to tell us, that God is a merciful God, and they hope he will, for Christ's sake, be merciful to them, and save them; never thinking that, though God be very merciful in affording them the means of salvation, and calling them to repentance, yet he never promised salvation to any but those who use those means and repent. Though God be *slow to anger*, yet *will be not acquit the wicked*, Nahum i. 3. *He that made them will not have mercy on them*, Isai. xxvii. 11. Let me therefore beseech you, as you love your own soul, that you do not vainly hope yourself into everlasting despair. So will you do, if you take a bold and ungrounded presumption for an humble and obedient hope. Humility, and the fear and love of God, and obedience to his laws, must either go along with your hope, and help it on its way, or it will never come through to its end. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy*, Psal. cxlvii. 11. They only can hope for his mercy that fear him, otherwise they shall hope for a thing which they shall never find. *Then shall I not be ashamed* (saith the Psalmist) *when I have respect to all thy commandments*, Psal. cxix. 6. Without an universal obedience, you shall at last be ashamed of your vain hope, finding it frustrated. Live in humble obedience to the laws of God, then may you say with him, ver. clxvi. *Lord, I have hoped for thy salvation, and done thy commandments*. This indeed is to be our confidence, *That after we have done the will of God, we shall receive the promise*, Heb. x. 36. *The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish*, Prov. x. 28. Can you hope for that which you do not love nor desire?

Par.

Par. No: If I had no love or desire of salvation, I could not hope for it.

Min. You have heard formerly, that the happiness of heaven implieth the perfection of holiness. If then you hope for that blessed state, you love and desire holiness; and yet how few of them, that say they hope for happiness, have any love at all for holiness? Is it not plain then that they hope not for it? *Every man, that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as God is pure, 1 John iii. 3. Having then these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, 2 Cor. vii. 1.* If this cleansing both of flesh and spirit, this perfecting holiness, be our business, then may we have hope; else we do but deceive ourselves with vain hopes.

Par. For ought that I can see, you would persuade us to put our hope in ourselves, and not in God. What can all this that you say signify, but that we are to place our confidence in our own performances, and to ground our hope upon a righteousness of our own, and not upon the free and gracious promises of God, given us in Christ Jesus our righteousness?

Min. I did expect that you should object thus against what I said: but take heed, that you reflect not upon the *Holy Ghost*, whose words I have now repeated unto you. Surely, by what I have already said unto you, you are convinced, that it is in vain for you to hope to be saved without a righteousness of your own, such as the Gospel of Christ requireth, to wit, a sincere obedience to the laws of Christ.

Par. I am satisfied that I must deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, or else I cannot have eternal life.

Min.

Min. If you be so far satisfied, then you see what reason I have to bid you beware how you hope in any promise of salvation through Christ, as long as you continue unholy, and will not perform the condition of evangelical or sincere obedience implied in this promise ; though I bid you not confide in your own righteousness, but in the mercy of God through the merits of Christ Jesus. I have said enough to you formerly, to shew you how the pardon is of God's free grace. Such also are his promises, all free, and such as we could no way deserve ; neither did any thing but his own goodness move him to make us such promises. Nor, though we do all that ever we can to perform the condition of duty which the promises imply, will our righteousness be such as will of itself be acceptable to God. Our hope is not then, that God will accept our obedience and duty for its own worth, and grant us salvation in consideration of that only ; but our hope is, that we sincerely endeavouring to serve God according to the laws of our blessed Redeemer, God will, for his sake, bestow salvation upon us. They that have taught you thus to plead for sin, have, above all others, great need to be undeceived, and rescued from this beloved error. To hope for the fulfilling of God's promised blessings on condition of doing our duty, is so far from hoping in our own righteousness, that it is the only safe way of hoping in the righteousness of God. Alas ! how strong is mens affection to sin ? It is this alone that can make it hard for them to believe, that the promise of eternal life in heaven is made to those only who will lead an holy life on earth. If men were not blinded with the love of sin and vanity, it would soon be impossible for them to hope, that without holiness any man can see God. I will not distrust your understanding so much, as

to say any more to you, to convince you, that if you will enjoy what God hath promised, you must do the duty that God hath commanded; or that the promises of God are encouragements to obey him chearfully, and not to sin against him presumptuously. You earnestly desire, you say, the things that you hope for; how do you express that desire?

Par. By endeavouring all I can to attain unto them.

Min. What need is there of such endeavours, if the promises be absolute, and imply no condition to be performed by you? What need you endeavour after what is sure unto you by virtue of the promise, whether you do any thing or no, to attain unto it?

Par. Something is certainly required of us, that we believe the promise, and that we pray unto God for the thing promised. We must believe that such promises are made by God, and that he who hath made them is faithful, and will fulfil them, or else we cannot hope for the things promised. And again, It is God's command that we thus believingly pray for those things that he hath promised. He hath commanded us to ask, and promised that we shall have.

Min. But shall you have for asking, except you pray according to God's will?

Par. No; we must ask what is good only, and agreeable to the will of God?

Min. How know you what to pray for, and how to pray for it?

Par. Christ Jesus himself hath taught us both, in that most excellent and perfect form of prayer, which he hath commended to the use of his church.

Min. If you understand that prayer, you will easily perceive by it, how vainly men hope for
salvation

salvation by Christ, without living holy lives. As Christ hath given us the promises to be the ground of our hope, so hath he given us a form of prayer for the expressing and exercising of our hope. You often repeat this prayer ; but do you understand it ? Do you indeed pray when you say it ?

Par. I hope I do both.

Min. If you do not, you miserably deceive yourself in your hope : You must not think you pray, except you understand what you say ; for to say a prayer without understanding, is but to pray as a parrot may do, and to offer the sacrifice of fools. To pray without a real desire of what you pray for, is but to mock God, drawing near to him with the lips when the heart is far from him, and to make a fool of prayer. Shall I examine you a little in the petitions of this prayer, that I may help you thereby to discern the soundness of your hope ?

Par. With all my heart ; for if I be ignorant, yet I am very desirous to learn.

Min. When you address yourself unto God in prayer, you come unto him as to a *Father* ; for so Christ hath taught us to call him in praying unto him. Do you both understand how God is your *Father*, and desire that he may continue a *Father* to you ?

Par. I understand that he is a gracious and loving Father unto poor sinners, and I desire that he may always be so to me ; and I come unto him trusting in his fatherly goodness, and desiring his fatherly blessing.

Min. The name *Father* is very comprehensive ; and in calling God so when you pray unto him, you are to own him to be the Maker and Preserver of all things, but in a more especial manner the *Father of spirits*, Hebr. xii. 9. that is, of *angels*, and the *souls* of men. He is the Father of
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all us men, as he is our Creator and Preserver; *we are all his offspring*, Acts xvii. 29. *made after his own image*, Gen. i. 27. and upheld by him from the mother's womb, *Psal. lxxi. 6.* But yet more eminently is he the Father of good men and Christians, in and through Jesus Christ, the Son of his love, *who are the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ*, Gal. iii. 26. Having by sin forfeited the privileges and blessing of children, by faith in Christ alone can we now approach unto God as unto a father. *As many as receive him, to them giveth he power* (or the privilege) *to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name*, John i. 12. And by him *we receive the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, father*, Rom. viii. 15. By this spirit are *we born again*, John iii. 3. and *have put on the new man, created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness*, Eph. iv. 24. and so are made *partakers of the divine nature*, 2 Pet. i. 4. Can you then with confidence call God *Father*, and hope for his fatherly blessing, without labouring after righteousness and true holiness?

Par. It seems very plain that I cannot.

Min. Do you then, when you call God *Father*, behave yourself as one of his children? *If I be a Father* (saith God) *where is my honour?* Mal. i. 6. Yea, are not many that call him Father every day in this prayer the children of the devil? *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God*, 1 John iii. 10. *He that committeth sin is of the devil*, ver. 8. They that are the children of God, will imitate their father, and *be followers of God as dear children*, Eph. v. 1. Is this your business, to imitate God in holiness and goodness?

Par. I dare not say that it is.

Min. And can you desire and hope that God will be your father, if you desire not to be his

child? God's children are *obedient children*, not *fashioning themselves according to the former lusts in their ignorance*, but *as he which hath called them is holy*, so do they labour to be holy in all manner of conversation, 1 Pet. i. 14, 15. Their business is, to be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, Phil. ii. 15. Inquire then, whether it be the ardent desire of your heart, that you may have grace to behave yourself as a child of God. I will not tire you with particulars, but only desire you to consider, whether they heartily own God their Father, who will be at their own command, and not at his; who will have their own will, and not do his; who will be at their own disposal, and at their own providing for, and not at his; who profane his name, and slight his ordinances, and repine at his doings, and are discontent with his government and provision for his family, and refuse to be at his allowance, or stinted by his will and pleasure in the use of his creatures. Can they, who are of this stubborn and crooked temper, have the face to call God their father? Can they hope he will be a father to them?

Par. They have indeed little reason to hope it.

Min. When you add in your prayers, *Which art in heaven*, what mean you by those words?

Par. What can I mean else by them, but that God is in heaven?

Min. Is not God on earth also?

Par. Yes, God is every where?

Min. Why then say you, *Which art in heaven*, as if God were there only?

Par. I do not mean, that God is in heaven only, but most eminently, and in a more glorious manner.

Min.

Min. He is so indeed; for *heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool*, *Isai. lxvi. 1. The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all, Psal. ciii. 19.* Do you then, when you come to God in prayer, conceive of God as now present with you, and yet as a most great and glorious king, full of unspeakable majesty and glory, more exceeding the most lofty imaginations that we creatures upon earth can have of him, than the glory and brightness of heaven above doth excel that of the earth below, which is all hid in darkness, till it be enlightened by it? Do you fall down with the lowest reverence and humility of soul at his feet, abasing yourself to the very dust? Are your *affections set on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God?* *Col. iii. 1.* Do you lay all earthly things, as much as you can, out of your mind, and labour to ascend in soul towards heaven, longing especially for *spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ?* *Eph. i. 3.* Are your treasures in heaven? and is your heart there also? Do you indeed own God your father in heaven, whilst you trust not to his over-ruling power and providence, submit not to his sceptre and command, continue in love with this world and the things upon earth, and are all for earthly blessings? Is this to be heavenly-minded, to have your desires and your hopes in heaven? Do we hope to insinuate into God's favour with vain flattery, giving him heavenly words, and keeping earthly and carnal hearts? And shall not all they, who thus mock God, deceive themselves in their hope of his blessing? Why, in the next place, do you say, *Our Father*, and not, *My Father*?

Par. Not because it is unlawful to say, *My Father*; but because he is a Father not to me only, but to all men in one sense, and more especially to all Christians in another.

Min. You say right. It is very fit that in our prayers we should acknowledge and confess God's universal power and goodness; and that we should not arrogantly and vainly go about to limit the bounty of God, or to ingross his mercy and blessing to ourselves: but owning the common relation of brotherhood betwixt ourselves and all mankind, and the special bond of brotherhood betwixt ourselves and all Christians, we should not go unto God as single persons only, but as the members of mankind, and chiefly of Christ's mystical body, the church, having the same care of all, and love to all, which we have for ourselves.

Par. I do think myself bound so to do.

Min. Then consider, if you have not too much cause to fear lest many deceive themselves in saying this prayer; such, I mean, as regard hardly any besides themselves, who care not much what becomes of the publick, or of any other, so it may be well with them; who so little consider themselves as members of either church or commonwealth, that their own private interest is all in all with them, and for that they are ready to violate the peace, and disturb the happiness of both. How can any of those, who are not in perfect love and charity with all men, especially tender of the welfare of their Christian brethren, say, as they should do, *Our Father*? What is the first thing which you beg of God in this prayer?

Par. The first petition of this prayer is this, *Hallowed be thy name.*

Min. What is it that you desire of God in these words?

Par. My desire in these words is, that God may be honoured and glorified by me and all men.

Min. You say well; by the *name* of God we are to understand God himself, and all that he hath made known of himself to us, with all that relates
unto

unto him; and by *hallowing* or sanctifying his name, we must understand, the making a just difference betwixt God and all other things whatsoever, exalting him above all things in our thoughts, our esteem, our affections, our service and whole behaviour towards him. But why do you begin your prayers with this petition?

Par. Because the glory and honour of God should be the chief thing in our desires, and the end of all our actions.

Min. You say right. We should be rather content to be without all things that we can wish for, than that God should not have from men the honour due unto his name. How then do they say this prayer, who have not this regard to God's honour, neither take care to honour God themselves, nor are concerned to see him dishonoured by others? In this petition we are to acknowledge and praise God for his excellency and wonderful perfections: How can they do so, who never took pains to know or consider what they are? What is it that you do to hallow God's name?

Par. I praise him, I give him thanks, I pray unto him. Is not this to honour his name?

Min. It is some part of the honour you owe unto God. But, I hope, you do not think it is all you are to do. If you think so, then all you do to honour him is no more, in effect, but to tell him that you honour him, and that you desire that others may tell him as much. What is it that you, as men and Christians, contribute towards the glorifying of God?

Par. We cannot add any thing to God's glory?

Min. We cannot add to the glory of God, so as that he shall be thereby more glorious in himself; but we may add to his glory among men, so that he may appear more glorious to them, and be more honoured by them. Can he pray thus,

that continueth in his wickedness daily dishonouring God? Can a man honour God with an unhallowed heart, and an unholy life? Is it your desire that your hearts may be sanctified by grace, that you may be capable of honouring God? He cannot desire God's honour, that is not in love with holiness, which in God is his honour, and in men is that which fits them to honour him. He cannot desire God's honour, that lives not so that *his light may so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his father which is in heaven.* He that dares profane God's name by swearing, or any other way, or that breaks his sabbaths, and violates the holy days of his worship, or that reverenceth not his sanctuaries, all his ordinances and his ministers, cannot desire that God's name may be hallowed. He that bears not chearfully and thankfully the chastisement of his sin, and is not well pleased that God is known by the judgments that he executeth in vindication of his own honour, cannot desire his name may be hallowed. You know you are commanded, that *whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, you do all to the glory of God,* 1 Cor. x. 31. that you make his glory the end, and his law the rule of all your actions; and you are to pray in this petition, that God would give you and others grace to do so, *that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ,* 1 Pet. iv. 11. Is this your hearty desire?

Par. If my heart deceive me not, it is.

Min. Consider, whether you do not wilfully and needlessly do many things whereby God is manifestly dishonoured, as he is by every thing that is sinful. How many things do people almost every day busy themselves in, whereby no man can imagine which way God can be honoured? How many things are there done, whereby God might be glorified; but we have no such end

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at all in doing them; but Self alone is our end?

Par. We cannot always have the glory of God in our minds, and actually in our present thoughts intend it in all we do.

Min. I confess it is hard to do as you say; but the oftner we do so, the better; and he that labours not to have God's glory in his thoughts, and to design it, seems too forgetful for what he was made, and what is his duty. But this, however, we must see to; and this, I fear, is but little thought on by most that use this prayer. *First*, That nothing be done by us sinfully against the command of God. *Secondly*, That we spend not our time idly, in vain and unprofitable things, whereby we cannot conceive how God is glorified. *Thirdly*, That we often consider our duty, and resolve to do nothing but according to the will of God, and to his glory. *Fourthly*, That we pray much to God for his grace so to do. And thus, in the most common and ordinary actions of our life, such as eating, drinking, sleeping, recreation, daily labour, daily expences, visits, and what else you can name, we are to take care that we sin not in any of them, and resolve to use them all to this purpose chiefly, that we may be fitted by them to serve God better. They that taste not God's goodness in all he giveth and alloweth them, that praise him not for his bounty and indulgence, that dishonour him with his own gifts, that waste their time and his blessings unprofitably, with what face can they tell God so confidently, that the first and chief desire of their heart is, that his name may be hallowed? When you say, *Thy kingdom come*, what mean you?

Par. I pray, that God would give me, and all men, grace to acknowledge his sovereign authority, and submit unto it, and that in subjection

to Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord and King, and that we may reign with him in his kingdom of glory.

Min. Having prayed that God's name may be hallowed, we particularly pray that it may be hallowed by mens subjection to the kingdom of Christ, that his Gospel may be more generally received and obeyed, that Christ may rule in our hearts by his holy spirit, that his church upon earth may flourish in good government and holy discipline, and daily be enlarged, and that we may be daily more and more fitted for, and, in his due time, be admitted into his kingdom of glory. Do you desire all this?

Par. So I profess to do.

Min. Take heed it be not an hypocritical profession only. If you be unwilling that your lusts should be subdued and mortified by the power of God's grace, and had rather feed them than kill them, you cannot desire nor hope for the kingdom of God in your heart. If you be not willing that a strict discipline should be set upon the church, and are not ready to submit unto it, and to undergo the spiritual censures of it when you have deserved them, you cannot desire the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. If you had really rather live here on earth to enjoy the pleasures of this life, than die to enjoy the blessedness of being with God in heaven, you do not desire the coming of God's kingdom of glory. You must then confess that wicked men, who cherish their lusts, and feed them to full strength to rebel against Christ, and war against his spirit, who dread nothing more than a wholesome and severe discipline to keep them in order, and who dote so on the vanities of this world, that they are not willing, on any terms, to leave them, do deceive themselves in saying this petition. You add,
Thy

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. What desire you in this petition?

Par. I desire that God would give us all grace to be obedient to his will and command whilst here we live, even as the holy angels and glorified souls in heaven are.

Min. If you desire the coming of Christ's kingdom in the sense I now gave you of it, you must needs also desire this that you say; for Christ is not owned as King, where his will is not obeyed: and therefore all they that do not desire his kingdom, as hath been said, must needs deceive themselves, if they think that they pray, when they say, *Thy will be done.*

Par. That is most certain and undeniable.

Min. Do you then approve of God's will to be most good and wise? Are his commandments no grievance to you? And do you thankfully accept of them as the rule of your life, making it your very business to obey them heartily and readily, even as the holy angels, *doing his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word?* Psal. ciii. 20. Have you made God's will to be your will, saying as Christ, *Not my will, but thine be done?* Luke xxii. 42. Are you willing to suffer with all humble submission, and kiss his rod, whenever he chastiseth you? Can you heartily say, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good,* 1 Sam. iii. 18. *Behold, here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good to him,* 2 Sam. xv. 26. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord,* Job i. 21. Can you rest well pleased and satisfied with God's ordering the course of the world, submitting freely to his wisdom, and concluding that all is well, and will be for the glory of God, and good of his church, how ill soever the face of things now looks, saying, *Great and wonderful are thy*

thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, O thou King of saints, Rev. xv. 3. All things work together for good to them that love God, Rom. viii. 28. How can they, that think the commands of God hard, that do them not, that cannot suffer with patience for righteousness sake, that are not satisfied with the methods of God's providence, say, Thy will be done, but they must deceive themselves, if they think they pray, in saying those words? All mens care is how to fulfil their lusts, and do the will of the flesh, and to have their own will in every thing; and yet they will flatter themselves with vain thoughts, that they thus indeed pray. What do you next desire, and in hope pray for?

Par. That God would give us this day our daily bread.

Min. Having in the first place, as it is fit, asked spiritual blessings and grace to honour God, you next pray for temporal blessings; and I doubt not but you would have your daily bread, all things needful for this life, and that you do not here dissemble with God, in telling him that you desire what indeed you do not desire; yea, it is well if this be not the first petition in this prayer that most of us can utter heartily, and if they do not mean by their daily bread, all things that their greedy and unsatiable appetites desire. What do you call your daily bread?

Par. Whatever is needful for the preservation and comfort of this life.

Min. That indeed God alloweth us to pray for, and to labour after. Are you then humbly sensible of your total dependence upon God for life, and all things needful to it? Do you own his fatherly care of you, and providence for you? Do you trust to nothing but his blessing for your safety,

safety, sustenance and preservation? Do you esteem his providence your surest estate? Why would you have these things?

Par. That I may live comfortably all my appointed time.

Min. Why do you desire to live?

Par. It is against nature not to desire it, and I cannot chuse but desire it.

Min. Yet you should not desire life for itself only, but therefore you should desire to live, that you may serve and glorify God. How long would you live?

Par. You need not question but we would all live as long as we can.

Min. We do indeed naturally desire to live for ever, and it should be our great care to live eternally: but, as for this mortal life on earth, we should desire it only so far as we may serve God thereby, and no longer than it seems good to him. In short, if you pray as you ought, you desire not one day of life otherwise than to serve God; and you desire no other provision for life, than what may help you to serve God most acceptably. You desire this life no longer than it seems good to God; and you would have the necessities of life no otherwise than of God's gift, and by his allowance; you would not have them by any sinful means, seeing they can neither so become truly yours, nor can you honour God with them. You would have God the chuser of your condition for you, and would not be your own carver. You are heartily pleased with whatever he gives, be it more or less, and think it best. You are not covetous of much, nor solicitous for hereafter, nor desire an inheritance for life to be presently settled upon you. You desire only this day, what God knows the fittest proportion for this day; and day by day, as God shall think fit
to

to prolong your days, that he would every day in like manner give you a fit allowance for the day. You *cast all your care upon him*, assuring yourself, *that he careth for you*, 1 Pet. v. 7. taking no thought for the morrow. He then that is doubtful of God's providence, and solicitous for the future, and greedy of much, and discontented with his present condition, and useth means which God alloweth not, or trusteth to means without God's blessing, or desireth superfluous things, or any thing more than present sustenance, or this any otherwise than to enable him to serve God during his life, or life itself, but with hearty submission to God's will, and in order to God's honour, deceiveth himself in thinking that he prayeth in this petition. I doubt not but it is your desire also, that your *trespasses* and sins may be forgiven you; for I cannot think that you have any desire to be punished for them.

Par. You may be very sure of that; we pray heartily that God would *forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us*.

Min. We had need so to do, knowing that our life on earth can be no blessing to us without God's pardon; and the things given us, as our daily bread, to preserve it, will otherwise only sustain us, as men in a prison are kept alive to the day of vengeance and execution of wrath.

Par. Without a pardon nothing can do us good, and therefore have we all reason to pray heartily for it.

Min. And you are to remember withal, that, without a deep sense and humble acknowledgement of your unworthiness of this pardon, and without a penitent confession and forsaking of your sins, you cannot have this pardon. *He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy*, Prov. xxviii.

xxviii. 13. Some beg pardon, yet will not own the sins whereof they are guilty: some own them, but will not forsake them. The former seem rather to challenge a pardon, than to beg it; the latter rather beg leave to sin, than a pardon for sin: Such certainly deceive themselves. And how many do so, who go on to sin over again the sins for which they have begged pardon, as if they were afraid they should want matter for this petition the next time? But now, when you add these words to your petition, *As we forgive them that trespass against us*; tell me in earnest, Doth your heart always go along with your tongue? Dare you say *Amen* to this part of your prayer, *So be it*, and no otherwise?

Par. I pray that God would give us grace to forgive others.

Min. You do well, not only because God hath made it your duty to forgive, but a condition also, without which you shall not be forgiven. Do you then, whenever you pray for forgiveness, forgive heartily all that offend you, and are desirous of your pardon? If not, what are you like to get by that prayer, but this, that God will deal with you, as you deal with others? He that hath taught you thus to pray, that you may not deceive yourself, hath taught you also what you are to expect by so praying. *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*, Matt. vi. 14, 15. What next pray you for?

Par. That God would not lead us into temptation?

Min. Do you pray so heartily?

Par. We have great reason to do so, otherwise we shall be very easily overcome by temptations?

Min.

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Min. Doth God lead men into temptation?

Par. We pray that he would not.

Min. Do you fear then that he might, if you did not so pray?

Par. If he might not, why should we so pray?

Min. *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed, Jam. i. 13, 14.* But God may permit you to be tempted, and withdraw from you the assistance of his grace, which alone can strengthen you to withstand the temptation; and you are to pray that he would not do so, nor leave you to yourself, lest the tempter prove too strong for you. Now, if you heartily desire this, why do you by sin provoke God to withdraw his holy *spirit* from you? And why do you boldly venture upon temptations, when you need not? Can you be in earnest in this petition, when you invite and seek temptations? You need neither leading nor driving into temptations, whilst you so daringly run into the midst of them, when you kindly welcome them when they come, and follow after them when they would be gone. Would you indeed be *delivered from evil*?

Par. Can you doubt of that?

Min. What, from the worst of evils, your sins? Have you indeed ~~begun~~ to account them evils? Are you so heartily afraid of them, that you cry out in earnest, Good Lord, deliver me from them? O that we could once see in men such a fear! What a blessed sight would that be! But surely, you are not much afraid of what you dearly love. You long not to be delivered from what you welcome with so much cost and charges. How do you conclude this prayer?

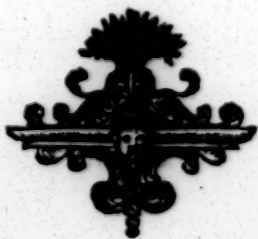
Par. With an hearty acknowledgment of God's Kingdom, Power and Glory everlasting, which I desire

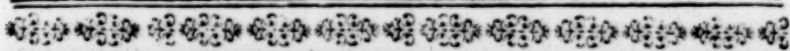
fire may be universally magnified, and on which my hope is grounded.

Min. As men begin, so they end their prayers in hypocritically flattering God Almighty. Having told him quite through their prayers a great many false stories and vain lyes, instead of pouring forth their hearts unto him, they would make him believe, that they, serving the devil, acknowledge his kingdom ; not fearing to rebel against him, yet own his Power ; and going on to dishonour him, design his Glory. Can such persons have the confidence to say *Amen* to such prayers? If they can, what can they hope for, but that as they have dissembled with God, and asked in words what in heart they desire not, so God should indeed say *Amen* too to their prayer ; *So be it*, not as you say, but as you mean, enjoy the lusts of your hearts, and receive in the end what you least fear, the due wages of your hypocrisy.

Par. God forbid that we should be thus disappointed of our hope.


Min. Pray that you may always have a right hope ; for that shall never be disappointed. I shall now leave you to consider of these things till we next meet. Farewel.





S E C T. XVIII.

How a man may deceive himself in his Charity.

Min.  OME, neighbour; having discoursed formerly of our *Faith* and *Hope*, and seen how we may deceive ourselves in both of them, the next thing we are to do, is, to inquire a little into the truth of our *Charity*.

Par. It will be very needful so to do; for 'tis said, that *the greatest of these is Charity*, 1 Cor. xiii. 13. And indeed I learn in that chapter, that all things without Charity are nothing worth; yea, *if I have not Charity, I am nothing*, ver. 2. It will be very dangerous therefore to deceive my self in this.

Min. It will be so indeed. That you may therefore be able to try yourself in this so necessary a grace of *Love* or *Charity*, you are to consider it as it respects its threefold object, *God*, *Ourselves*, and our *Neighbours*. Let us begin, as we ought, at the *Love of God*. Do you indeed love God?

Par. If I love not God, I cannot hope for the love of God, and must needs be very miserable.

Min. How then are you to love God?

Par. As our blessed Jesus hath told us, and nature itself teacheth us: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment*, Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

Min.

Min. You say very well ; we are to love God with the highest degree of love, with such a love as we can have for nothing else, no not for our dear selves, and, as nearly as we can, in a due proportion to his transcendent excellency and goodness. It is a wonderful thing to hear how confidently men will talk of their loving God, and how disdainfully they will take it, if any one shall seem to doubt, whether they love God so well as they pretend to do ; and yet it were well, if we could find one of an hundred that did not in this deceive himself.

Par. What reason can you have to think so hardly of us ?

Min. I wish I could see less reason for it ; but, alas ! it is very plain, that, amongst the pretenders to the love of God, many know not what it is to love God, many do really hate God, most do not express their love to him, as they would do, if they loved him as God.

Par. Can any man be ignorant what it is to love God ?

Min. It is not a thing so well and ordinarily understood as you may possibly imagine. Do you know God ? Do you know why God is to be loved ? Do you know with what kind of love you are to love him ? He must know all this, that knows what it is to love God. If you know not God, you love not God, but a notion of your own brain, an idol of your own phant'sy, which you have set up instead of God. If you know not for what you are to love God, you love at best a fiction of your own heart, a vain imagination of something you suppose to be in God. If you know not with what kind of love God is to be loved, you may think you love him, when in truth you hate him. O that one of many understood either what, or for what, or how they love !

Par. You will make our love of God to be a blind affection indeed.

Min. In the ignorant, it can be just nothing but a vain pretence. And though I charge not you with so much ignorance as this, yet you cannot but know, that very many, who say they love God, are chargeable with it. But do you think that you indeed love God as God?

Par. How should I love him else?

Min. It is easy to love God in some sort, and yet not to love him as God. You may love God as you may love a good man, not because he is a good man, but because he hath done you some good, for which you would love him, as now you do, though he were an evil man: so if you love God only for some good thing which you receive from him, you love him as one that hath done you good; and if you could find that the devil did you the like good, you would love him as well. Do you think this is to love God as he is God?

Par. We are to love God for his goodness to us.

Min. Yes, and for his essential goodness in himself, all the excellencies and perfections of his nature; for which you cannot love him, if you know not his nature with its excellent perfections, that essential infinity of goodness, which is inseparable from him, and for which he is transcendently amiable in himself, considered without any relation to us. To love him merely for something else, is not to love him as God, and for himself. O! how few consider this? How few bestow any thoughts in the contemplation of the divine excellencies? Yea, how few know them in any measure? And then how should these unknown things move their affections, or make any impression of love upon their hearts?

Par.

Par. I thought we had been to love God, because he loveth us, and doth us good.

Min. You are to love God for that reason, and here your love first begins; but here it is not to end: for this were to love God for yourself only, and that for which only you love God, you love better than God, and so you love not God as that which is best and most lovely, that is, not as God. I will not tempt you into despair of ever loving God, by asking you, as too many do, whether you can love God so merely for himself, and his own essential perfections, that you think you could love him whether he did you any good or no: Why should you be put to baffle yourself with a supposition of what cannot be? Only this you must know, that you are not to love God only for his goodness to you, but also and chiefly for the excellency of his nature. And we are farther to consider the relations of God to us, and to love him as he is our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer and Sanctifier; as our Owner, Governor and Benefactor; as the Original and Author of all things; as the wise Orderer and Disposer of all things; as the ultimate end of all things, and the happiness of men. How many think, at least say, they love God, whilst they never consider any thing of all this, and so understand not for what they are to love him, even in relation to themselves, nor what are the good things which they receive from him for which they are to love him? And how can these love him with such a love as is due unto him as God?

Par. We love him according to the best of our understandings.

Min. You can love him therefore no better, so long as you understand him no better; therefore the love you have for God is far from the love wherewith you should love him. Our love

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to every thing should be suitable to the nature and worth of it: therefore should we labour to understand the true value of things, that we may love them according to their worth.

Par. But who can love God according to his worth?

Min. No man can, because his excellency is transcendent and incomprehensible. But this we must be sure of, that our love to God be above the love that we have for any creature, or for ourselves, otherwise it cannot be any way suitable to God. To love him as God, is to love him with an affection that we cannot judge any creature capable of. It is to admire, to value, to desire, to delight in him *above* all things. It is to admire, value, desire and delight *in* him in all things; and in nothing but for him, as it comes from him, shews something of him, helps to serve him, or leads to him. It is to delight in him without any of these things, as much as with them all. It is to delight in him as all things to us, and without whom we count all things as nothing. It is to value him so, that all things else may appear vile, base, contemptible and odious in comparison of him. It is so to be pleased with him, that even sufferings, and wants, and death itself may be a pleasure to us, that we may enjoy him more fully. And if it be all this to love God, what think you of your love to him?

Par. If it be all this to love God, I fear very few of us love God indeed. But however I may be defective in my love towards God, yet, I hope, you shall never have cause to charge me with hatred of God, as you seemed but now to charge some of us.

Min. I charge none of you particularly with hating God: but I say, some that pretend to love him may yet hate him.

Par.

Par. I cannot imagine that any man, that understands what God is, can possibly hate him.

Min. To hate God, I confess, is a harsh expression, which the very worst of men like not to hear; and few, if any, will own that they hate God. They will rather own themselves atheists, than haters of God: for it is by some accounted an argument of great wit, to deny there is a God, and to call *David* a fool for calling the atheist a fool. But to own a God, and yet to hate him, the atheist himself will call this folly. Yet that there are *haters of God*, Rom. i. 30. the word of God in many places witnesseth. Christ himself saith of some, *They have both seen, and hated both me and my Father*, John xv. 24.

Par. And yet it seems very strange to me, that any man should hate God.

Min. I wonder not that you should think it strange; nay, I verily think, that, wholly, and in all respects, no man living, that understands what God is, can possibly hate him. Men cannot hate goodness in their own notion of it, as it seems goodness to them, as they find themselves benefitted by it. Men hate not God as their Maker, Preserver and Feeder; as their Saviour, Redeemer and Glorifier. Yet, tho' no man hateth God as such a Benefactor to them, they hate him notwithstanding, even whilst they own him to be all this to them, and, it may be, more than they hate any thing else.

Par. They must needs love him that doth them so much good, and without whom they are sensible that they could enjoy no good thing, nor so much as be at all.

Min. Suppose they have some kind of love to him for this, yet is not this to be called truly the pure love of God, but indeed *Self-love*; for they love God only for their own sakes. And notwith-

standing this love, they may really hate God : and that, both considering him comparatively with other things, simply in his own nature, and relatively to them.

Par. I wonder how you can ever prove this.

Min. Very easily ; especially if you will own that to be hatred of God, which *Jesus Christ* in his Gospel calleth so, as I think you will even by your own reason be forced to do. For if you love two things, whereof you value one much above the other, and are content to lose the one rather than want the other, do not you hate even that which in itself you love, in comparison of that which you love so much better, that for the sake thereof you are willing to lose the other ?

Par. I do comparatively hate it, as I hate my money in comparison of my life ; but yet I love my money.

Min. Yea, and you love it with a true love, *that is*, as well as it deserves. But to love God so as to love him less than any other thing, or no better than other things, is not a true love of God, because it is not to love him according to his worth. Christ therefore will not allow it to be a love, but a hatred of God. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me, Matt. x. 37. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple, Luke xiv. 26.* We are bound by the law of God and nature to love all these, and yet we are to love them less than Christ, that is, comparatively to hate them, so as to be ready to forsake them for the love of Christ, if he shall call us to it ; *that is*, whenever we must leave one, we must chearfully part with them, that we may adhere to Christ : this he calls
hating

hating of them : and yet we give them true honour and love, even all that is due unto them, because Christ is better than they, and to be preferred before them all in our affections. In like manner, though a man have some love for God because of his goodness, yet, if there be any thing that he loves either more than God, or equally with God, he hates God, because he undervalues him in his affections, and gives him not the honour due unto his name.

Par. I do confess, this is to hate God comparatively.

Min. And he that so hates him, is not worthy of him. Ask yourself, if you love not the world, and the things of the world, so much, that you would not willingly part with them for God's honour ; if so, *the love of the Father is not in you,* 1 John ii. 15.

Par. Yea, but I hate him not for all that.

Min. If any man be a friend of the world, he is the enemy of God ; for the friendship of the world is enmity with God, Jam. iv. 4.

Par. That is to be understood of the wickedness of the world.

Min. I grant it : and this I infer from it, that if any man, by the love of worldly things be tempted to continue in sinning against God, and chuseth not rather to lose all the world than join with it in any wicked thing, he is the enemy of God, and hates him. Again, Christ tells us, that we are, for his sake, to deny ourselves, and to take up the cross. What is that, but to hate our selves and our life in comparison of him ? Yet how few of them, that say they love God and Christ, love them any otherwise than for themselves, and so far as may stand with their own worldly interests ?

Par. I cannot deny, but many seem to hate God comparatively ; but that any hate him simply in himself considered, I cannot conceive.

Min. Yet may you easily see it, if you will. Do not many hate goodness, and love evil ?

Par. Too many.

Min. All that do so, hate God, though they think they love him.

Par. How can that be ?

Min. *There is none good but one, that is God, Mat. xix. 17.* All goodness is of God, who alone is good, and maketh good, by a communication of his goodness : even as light is from the sun, so is all goodness a beam or ray of God's goodness, communicated by his spirit ; so that whosoever hates goodness, hates God, who is infinitely good, and cannot be otherwise. He that hates the light, must needs hate the sun. He that hates the water, must needs hate the ocean ; and so he that loves evil, hates God, *Psal. xcvi. 10. Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.* As he that loves darkness must needs hate the light, because it is contrary to darkness, and deprives him of what he loves. God is contrary to evil, that is, to what he loves, and hath declared himself to hate what the evil man loves, hates his very love, and hates him as a lover of evil, and commands him at his peril to cease from loving it. Inquire then in good earnest into your own soul, and see if there be not some goodness that you hate, and some evil that you love ; if there be, you may be sure that you deceive yourself in thinking you love God ; yea, you are not only without all true love of God, but you also hate him.

Par. You have put me upon an inquiry which I have not hitherto thought so needful, as I now perceive it is.

Min.

Min. Consider God, in the next place, *relatively* to you, as your Sanctifier, and as your Governor, and try if you hate him not as such.

Par. Far be it from me to hate God in any respect.

Min. Do you love God as your *Sanctifier*? then you love the work of his Spirit, which is holiness. You love God's bounty; but do you love his justice also? You love his mercy; but do you love also his holiness? Do you love him as the righteous Governor of the world, and as your most holy Lawgiver, who hath given you very pure and strict laws to live by, and restrains you from your sinful pleasure by severe penalties? Do you love him as your righteous judge, that will render to every one according to his deeds? O! how many say they love God, and yet, on condition they might live as they list, and take their liberty, could be well content that there were no God to govern and judge the world, yea, are really sorry and troubled, that there is a God to call them to account; are not pleased to think that he should be so holy and so just, or that his laws should be so strict; but could wish with all their hearts, that it might be otherwise? Are not the very thoughts of God troublesome to many?

Par. I cannot judge of mens thoughts.

Min. But do they not discover as much by their unwillingness to hear any discourse of him as their Governor and Judge, or of the holiness of his laws, or his calling them to a reckoning for their disobedience?

Par. There are too many that are impatient of such discourses.

Min. Do not they hate God that love not to hear of him; that think his government unreasonable and tyrannical; that daily rebel against him, and murmur at his providence; that could
heartily

heartily wish he were not what he is, or that there were no God; that have no desire to go hence to enjoy him; that had rather be here always, and without him; that seek divertisements to put him out of their thoughts?

Par. I confess it is too plain, that many desire not his company, but had rather be without him; and that he were not at all, than that he should observe their actions, restrain them from their pleasures, chastise them for their offences, or call them to judgment for their sins: and in all these respects must needs hate God.

Min. See now how men express their love to God. Can men love God, and yet not shew it?

Par. It is certain, that true love, where-ever it is, will shew itself as there is occasion.

Min. How is your love to God to express and shew itself?

Par. By keeping his commandments. Our obedience is the touchstone of our love to God; *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, 1 John v. 3.* And again, *This is love, that we walk after his commandments, 2 John vi.*

Min. This is love, not in word only, but in deed. Thus will our blessed Jesus have us testify our love to him; *If ye love me (saith he) keep my commandments, John xiv. 15.* You think, it may be, with that confident young man, *Luke xviii. 21.* that you have kept them from your youth up.

Par. No, I know too well that I have not; but I do endeavour it as well as I can.

Min. That is the true evangelical obedience. But take heed you deceive not yourself. Try yourself a little, by considering now only the commandments of the first table, and that very briefly. Only by the way, when you say you endeavour to keep these commandments, do you indeed

indeed strive to obey them, as they are God's commandments?

Par. I own them to be his commandments, and I labour to keep them in obedience to him.

Min. If so, you do all you do in sincerity of heart, as to God and not as to men; you obey them universally, because they are all his; the least, as well as the greatest; in private, as well as in publick; the most costly, as well as the cheap; the hardest, as well as the easiest; what is against your natural temper, your worldly interest, the fashion of the world, as well as what suits best with them. Have you indeed the true God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and no other, for your God?

Par. I have.

Min. Then you go on to know the Lord daily more and more; you own yourself his creature, his possession, his subject, his alms-man; you attribute all to him, and nothing to yourself. You fear him so, as you fear nothing else in comparison of him; you trust to him so, that you dare rely on nothing else but him; you believe him so, that your faith is governed by his word only; you love him so, that nothing else hath any share in your affections, but subordinately to him. The great desire of your soul is to honour and enjoy him. The great trouble of your heart is, that you can honour and serve him no better. You have resolved, that yourself, and all you have, shall be wholly his, at his command, and devoted to his service. You have no self to please and humour, no world to seek and love, no man to flatter and gratify, no interest or concern to secure or promote, in opposition to his will and honour. There is nothing that is more your religion or your care, that you are more devout in, or zealous for, than the honour and service of God.

Par.

Par. I wish I could say all this truly.

Min. There be many *Atheists*, if not in their faith or opinion, yet in their wishes. And there are many *Polytheists*, if not in profession, yet in practice. I suppose you do not worship either graven or painted images.

Par. No ; I do abhor it.

Min. But do you frame to yourself no likeness of God? Do you not worship your own imaginations instead of God? Do not you make him a God after your own phant'sy, and then perform all your acts of worship to an idol of your own inventing? Do not you think that God is best pleased with that kind of worship that you best like? Do you make his word the rule of your worship? Do you maintain in your soul that holy reverence and regard of God, that you use all things that relate unto him reverently? Do you not vainly and impertinently mention God's holy name ; nor do any thing, or willingly see any thing done, whereby it is dishonoured, or whereby occasion is administred to others to dishonour or blaspheme it? Do you freely allow God his times and days of worship? Do you not grudge him any part of that time, or count it little better than lost, that you bestow upon God in prayer, praise, meditation, reading or hearing his word, receiving his sacraments, christian conference, and the like? Do you not steal from God a great part of that time to bestow it upon your needless business, your vanity, your sports, carnal ease or pleasure? I am sure very many do thus, and they especially who, for their own sakes, have least need so to do, who cannot deny it, and yet dare pretend themselves good Christians. Now if such men think that they love God whilst they grudge him so reasonable and easy a service, whether they deceive themselves or no, I dare leave you

you to judge ; yea, or themselves, whenever they shall be so much in their wits, as to consider the things which are of greatest importance to them.

Par. You have made it very plain to me, that most of us deceive ourselves in thinking we love God, when indeed we do not, but rather hate him. But I am afraid you will find the next thing a very hard task, *I mean*, to prove that we do not love *ourselves*.

Min. I wish it were indeed as hard a matter as you imagine it.

Par. There is no question to be made of it, I think, but that we all love ourselves well enough, if not too well.

Min. A man cannot love himself too well, if he love himself as he ought to do.

Par. I have heard great outcries made by Ministers against *Self-love*, as the root of all wickedness.

Min. It is natural to every man to love himself ; and I think it impossible for any man in his wits not to love himself. God needs not command us to do so, because he hath made it natural to us, and we cannot but do it.

Par. Why then is Self-love so much condemned ?

Min. True Self-love is never condemned, but irregular, and indeed false Self-love ; and here lies our Self-deceit : we take that to be true Self-love which is not so. That there is a Self-love allowed by God is plain, for most of his laws are given to this end, that we may take care of ourselves, and do ourselves no hurt, but all the good we can ; and besides, he hath made the love of ourselves the measure of our love to our neighbours, commanding us to love our neighbours as ourselves ; so that if it be not a duty to love ourselves,

selves, it can be no duty to love our neighbours. And that there is a Self-love that is sinful, is as plain, because there is a Self-love that keeps us from doing our duty, either to God or our neighbour, and is the fruitful mother of all sin and wickedness, therefore St. *Paul* sets it in the front, as a leader-in of most other sins, *Men shall be lovers of their own selves*, 2 Tim. iii. 2. Then follows it, that they shall be *covetous, proud, boasters, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, and what not*; It will therefore nearly concern us to inquire how we love ourselves.

Par. How should we love ourselves, but by wishing and doing ourselves all the good we can?

Min. Be sure first, that you know what is good for yourselves, and then hold you there; wish and do yourselves all the good you can, and no hurt, and you love yourselves as you ought.

Par. All the danger then, I see, lieth in mistaking evil for good.

Min. It doth so indeed. Men may think they love themselves, when yet they neither know themselves, nor what in themselves they should most love, nor what it is to love themselves, or what will do them good or hurt. And if they be ignorant of, or consider not these things, they must needs herein be subject to Self-deceit.

Par. You seem to me to talk at a strange rate; what do we know, if we know not these things?

Min. Do you indeed know yourself what you are?

Par. I thought I had formerly satisfied you, that I know myself to be a man, a rational creature, composed of a visible body and invisible soul: and then you shewed me, that of these two parts the soul is the principal, and most properly myself, as that whereby I am a man, and differ from brute creatures.

Min.

Min. I am glad you remember it so well ; you will find it now of great use to you : he that loves himself aright, must especially love his soul, the principal part of himself.

Par. That is very true, and sure all men know it.

Min. How well men know this, I cannot tell ; but I am sure most seem very little to consider it ; and they that love themselves most with the commonest sort of Self-love, consider it least of all. As if they were only a higher degree of brutes, or only a handsomer sort of beasts, of a better shape than the rest, with a faculty of talking and discoursing, which the rest want : they seem to have as little regard to their souls, as if they had none ; as much for their bodies, as if the body were the whole man. And shall that man be said to love himself, who hath either none, or so little regard of his soul, the best and principal part of himself, as if he had no such thing, or were not sensible of it ? *What is a man profited (saith Christ) if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?* Matt. xvi. 26. Do you know what it is for which your souls should be loved ?

Par. They are to be loved best, because they are our best parts.

Min. Many love, as they think, their own souls, who yet love not that in them which is most lovely. They love their reason, and knowledge, and invention, and wit and learning, and wisdom, craft and cunning too well. They use all means, take all pains, are at any cost to accomplish themselves with some of these to their hurt many times : but where are the few that love their souls for the image of God upon them, who bestow half so much care, pains and cost to have them truly sanctified, and to have God's image in righteousness and true holiness renewed in them ? How

doth he love his soul, who willingly lets it want the only thing which can render it truly rich, beautiful, noble, happy, and lovely in the eyes of both God and man? Doth he love his soul, who wilfully hurts it?

Par. It is certain he doth not.

Min. Doth not he hurt his soul, that suffers the overflowings of corruption to drown all that is truly good in it? Or he that takes part with his flesh against it, and endeavours to advance his worse part against his best, to feed and strengthen it till the lusts thereof get the mastery of his reason? Yea, how doth he love himself that raiseth war within himself, and daily fomenteth and cherisheth it to his own ruin; that is always kindling fires, or raising floods in himself, by passion, intemperance, luxury and wantonness, to consume or drown all solid judgment, serious reason, and true piety? Doth he love himself, that undermines his own credit and reputation, stains his good name and honour?

Par. These are things a man would not own for signs of love in another.

Min. And yet how little do men regard their own true honour and most valuable reputation? God made us in honour, and it had been our highest honour to have continued such as he made us; but since *man, that was in honour, is become like the beasts that perish*; if he love himself, he should endeavour to be restored to the honour whence he is fallen, and to improve daily in all those faculties and excellencies, whereby he may most excel inferior creatures, and become again most like his Maker, and be known to be a child of God. How can he love himself, that takes all courses to dishonour and degrade himself into a beast, by delighting in and stuffing himself with earthly things and sensual pleasures? The pleasures

fures of a man are such as are proper to a man, and such as a man only can enjoy, and not such low things as every swine or goat can share in. Once more, Doth he love himself, that doth more hurt to himself than all the world besides can do him, yea, more than the devil can do, and as much as he can wish him? Yet every sinner doth thus hurt himself. He by sin robs himself of that good which nothing else could deprive him of, brings himself to that misery, which nothing else could bring upon him. He that indulgeth himself in any impiety, injustice or intemperance, bars up the gates of heaven against himself, opens the gate of hell upon himself, arms the divine vengeance to destroy himself, and heaps up to himself wrath against the day of wrath. Is this then true Self-love? God intreats us to have mercy on ourselves; he reacheth out eternal salvation daily unto us; he beseecheth us, as we love our souls, to accept of it; and we will not. And yet will we needs have the assurance to say, we love ourselves. What think you of this?

Par. I think we are much more our own enemies, than I thought we could have been.

Min. If then we have learned to love ourselves no better, it can be no great wonder if we know not how to love our neighbours.

Par. I make no question of it, but many are deceived in their love to their neighbours.

Min. I make some question of it, whether most men can here deceive themselves or no. For I am apt to believe, that howsoever they may know it their duty, yet very few can think that they do it, or ever go about to do it. And their Self-deceit is not, that they think they love their neighbour, when they love him not, but that they think they are Christians though they love him not.

Par. No man can think himself a Christian, that loveth not his neighbour.

Min. He cannot, when he rightly considers what Christianity is, *to wit*, a sincere obedience to the laws of Christ, among which this of loving our neighbour is none of the least. We find it often repeated, and always with some special mark set upon it to commend it to our practice, which you should do well to observe. Our blessed Jesus, in answer to the lawyer's question (*Which is the great commandment?*) having told him, that to love God is the first and great commandment, tells him also, that the second is like unto it, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*; and then adds, *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*, Matt. xxii. 36, &c. St. Paul, repeating the duties of the second Table, sums up all in these words, *If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*, Rom. xiii. 9. And again, he saith, *All the law is fulfilled in one word, even this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*, Gal. v. 14. And St. James calls it the *Royal law*, saying, *If ye fulfil it, ye do well*, Jam. ii. 8. And after all this, and much more to this purpose said in Scripture of this duty, shall any man call himself a Christian, that doth it not?

Par. Whatever he may call himself, it is certain he is none.

Min. Can a man love his neighbour, and not know who is his neighbour?

Par. He cannot; but every one knows his neighbours among whom he lives.

Min. Not only they who live near you, or are more especially related to you, but all men are your neighbours, whom you are to love, even as yourselves. So Christ hath taught us, in answer to the same lawyer, asking him, *Who is my neighbour?*

bour? supposing the *Jews* only, men of his own nation and religion, to be his neighbours: but Christ, by the parable of the man lying wounded by thieves, and a stranger's taking compassion and care of him, shews him, that every one who any way may stand in need of us, is to be loved as our neighbour, *Luke x. 26, &c.* We are to love God for himself, above ourselves and all things; we are to love all men for God's sake, in obedience to his command, and in regard of his image. As we must not shed the blood of any man, because of the image of God; so are we to love all men for the image of God, and every one in that degree, as we see God's image more upon him. The faithful and godly are to be most loved, because most like God. The very worst, even our enemies, are to be loved, as they are God's work, and have something of his image in them, and that we ourselves may be more like God in that love to enemies: *As we have opportunity, we are to do good unto all men, but especially to them who are of the household of faith, Gal. vi. 10.* Do you then look on all men as your neighbours?

Par. So far, as that I do them no hurt.

Min. Is that to love them? You love them not, except you do them all the good you may, as you have opportunity; yea, if you do not so, you do them hurt, you withhold from them their due, against the command, *Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it, Prov. iii. 27.* Love is a debt we owe unto all, *Rom. xiii. 8.* And it is injustice not to pay our debts. Do you love your neighbour as you should do?

Par. How is that?

Min. Do you love him for God's sake? Do you love him as yourself?

Par. I love him, because God hath commanded it.

Min. Then you love all that God hath commanded you to love, even strangers and enemies.

Par. That is a hard lesson to learn.

Min. But it must be learned, or you cannot be a Christian. To love an enemy, in whom you can see little love-worthy, from whom you have received much hurt, this is to love for God's sake, because he hath commanded it, for the love you bear to God: *If you love them that love you, what reward have you?* Matt. v. 46. This is but Self-love; you serve yourself by it; from yourself you must expect the reward. If you love your enemy, this is love to God, he will reward you. *If you salute your brethren, what do you more than others? Do not even the publicans so?* ver. 47. This is but a heathenish love; you love not like a Christian, who is the child of his heavenly Father, and loves as he loves, even his enemies. If you love for God's sake, it is goodness you love best. A man, by whom you have never been profited, yea, by whom you have accidentally suffered much hurt, shall be more loved by you for his virtue and religion, and likeness to God in goodness, than an evil man, that hath been your great benefactor and patron: otherwise you love more for yourself than for God's sake.

Par. This I have not hitherto well considered.

Min. Do you love your neighbour as yourself?

Par. I do so, as to the kind of love wherewith I love my neighbour; but I dare not say, that I love my neighbour altogether as well in the measure of love which I have for him, as I love myself.

Min. Yet that is the meaning of Christ's command, that we love others with the like measure and degree of love wherewith we love ourselves,
or

or it will be very hard to find out what sense those words [*as thy self*] can bear. However, I will not press you with it at this time. The easiest interpretation that you can put upon them in favour to yourself, is this, That you are so to behave yourself towards others, as you would rationally desire they should behave themselves towards you in like case, according to that of our Saviour, *All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them : for this is the law and the prophets*, Matt. vii. 12.

Par. This rule I desire to walk by.

Min. So most will say ; but that most men do not so, is too well known. Try it therefore by your thoughts, words and deeds, respecting your neighbour. Do you think and judge of him lovingly, and as you desire to be thought and judged of by him ? Are you ready always to entertain the best opinion of him that you can ? Do you put the best sense and construction on all that he saith or doth, that his words and actions will bear ? Are you ready to excuse all his failings and errors, as far as you possibly can, with regard to truth and conscience ? Thus, I dare say, you would have others deal with you, and would call them unjust and uncharitable in doing otherwise.

Par. I should indeed think no otherwise of them.

Min. How comes it to pass then that men are so generally prone, upon the slenderest grounds, to entertain the foulest suspicions of others, and to think the very worst of all that proceeds from them, and account them hypocrites, formalists, and what not ? Are you wont to speak of others as you would have them speak of you ? Do you say all the good of them that you can with truth, whensoever there is occasion for it ? Are you ready, as far as you can, to vindicate them, when

you hear others defame them? Do you say no manner of evil of them farther than by law you are bound to do? Do you meddle with none of their affairs any farther than necessity, justice or charity compels you, so as you may do good to them, or to others, whom you are more to regard by so doing? Say, if you would not have others thus to deal with you in their discourse?

Par. You may be very confident that I would.

Min. How is it then that all meetings are full of almost no other talk but idle chat and prating of other mens matters, which are of no concernment at all to the company? Why are we so blab-tongued in telling stories, yea, even all we know one of another, defaming, backbiting, laughing at them, ripping up all their faults, miscarriages, infirmities, imprudences, follies, merely to disgrace them and make ourselves merry? Is this to love our neighbours as ourselves?

Par. We are indeed generally too free of our tongues, and talk of others more than becomes us as loving neighbours.

Min. I wish mens actions favoured any more of Christian love than their speech doth. Do you help your neighbour according to your power by your prayers, your advice, your friendly offices of all sorts? Do you injure no man in any thing that belongs unto him? Do you forgive injuries, forbear revenge, render good for evil? Thus I know you would be dealt with by others.

Par. No man can doubt it.

Min. Should I poze you in all the commandments of the second Table, which are no more but a comment upon this one command of loving our neighbours as ourselves, I fear I should put you hard to it, to shew, that in all points you do to others, as you would have them do to you. Can you say that you are as obedient to your superiors

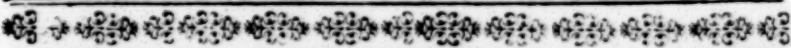
periors of all sorts, as, if you were yourself in the same place, you would think it reasonable your inferiors should be to you? Are you as civil, courteous, obliging, affable, beneficent, and as helpful and merciful every way to your inferiors, as you know your superiors should be to you? Take you as much care for other mens lives, health, liberty, as you think it fit other men should take of yours? Do you regard the modesty and chastity of others wives, daughters and relations, as you would have them to regard that of yours? Are you as careful not to impair or damage, yea, to advance and promote other mens estates, as you would have them be towards you? Do you sell as you would buy, and buy as you would sell? Do you discover the faults of what you sell? Do you not undervalue what you would buy? Do you wait for no advantages to over-reach another in any bargain? Do you lend as you would borrow? Do you pay your debts punctually? Do you remit where there is cause? Do you injure no man's credit and reputation, but advance or secure it to your power? Do you covet nothing that another hath, nor seek gain, or pleasure, or convenience by his loss, displeasure or inconvenience? What think you of all this, when you impartially consider it?

Par. I think that christian charity is a very rare thing in the world, and, for my part, I know not where to find it.

Min. I hope then you are convinced, that men too commonly deceive themselves in all these three mother graces of *Faith*, *Hope* and *Charity*. And do they not then deceive themselves in thinking themselves Christians, and that the salvation which Christ hath purchased and promised, belongs to them? O! go home, and humble yourself to God; repent of your past folly, and be-

come a new man. Seriously renew your vows, and be more serious than to dally any longer with God and your own soul.

Par. I thank you, Sir, with all my heart, for so freely discovering my folly to me, and letting me see myself, which, in truth, I never well saw before. Let me beseech you to assist me with your prayers at the throne of grace, to *obtain a blessing from God.* Farewel, Sir, for this time.

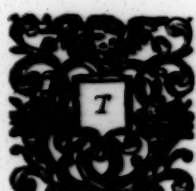


WE have extended the ensuing Contents to a great length, so as to be in a manner an Abstract of the Book, which we thought the more necessary, because of the very Weighty and Serious Truths and Divine Maxims contained in it, by the Reading of which thus epitomiz'd, the Reader will not only be referr'd to every material Place, under the respective Sections, but will also have before him at one short View, the Sum of this most important Work: With which he may refresh his Memory, when his Leisure will not permit him to re-peruse the Piece: for we will venture to say, That tho' the Work is handled in the plainest and most intelligible Manner, yet its Importance is such, that the Divine Precepts contained in it cannot be too often inculcated, nor set in too advantageous a Light for the Benefit of Persons of short Memories and little Leisure.



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